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The HERITAGE
AND OTHER STORIES
VIOLA BROTHERS SHORE



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THE HERITAGE

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THE HERITAGE

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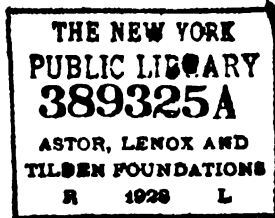
BY

VIOLA BROTHERS SHORE

NEW  YORK

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**TO THE MEMORY OF
MY FATHER
DR. ABRAM BROTHERS**

TRANSFER FROM C. O. OCT 1928

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THE HERITAGE

ONE: THE HERITAGE

THE speedster, a dark gray one with blue trimmings, nibbled its way in and out of the Sunday-afternoon procession of automobiles down Lafayette Street. The driver, his blue eyes intent on the shifting stream of cars ahead, was conscious of the presence of the girl beside him simply because he knew she was there. The girl, slim, dark-skinned, blue-suited, was, as always, more acutely conscious of the boy. Her gray eyes, vivid, black-lashed, continually traveled with a thrill of pleasure from his clean-cut profile with the line of honey-colored hair showing beneath the rough brown hat to his broad-shouldered frame incased in a brown overcoat, the last word in English cut and cloth, and in every fiber of her being she was conscious of him; conscious that he was handsome, strong, well-born and engaged to marry her—Miriam Heller, whose parents for years had stood behind the counter of the little stationery store where the children of the Monroe Street Public School went to buy their pads and pencils and lickrish shoe laces and marshmella doll babies. That is, he was going to marry her after he had won over his mother, who had been a De Lacey-Scovil and was not going to be easily won over to the idea of a Jewish daughter-in-law.

Not that Miriam was Jewish any more. Not since

the time when, at the death of her mother, she had left the little old private house wedged between two tenements, the top floor of which had been the Heller home, and come to live in the spacious, white-stone, four-story residence of her uncle, Dr. Philip Broadstream, in the best section of Brooklyn, overlooking the park.

There was little in the new life to remind her of the old. All the tendencies, on the contrary, were to help her to forget; and she meant to forget. Mimi had not chosen to be born a Jew. She did not believe in the Jewish faith. So she did not see why, since it all meant nothing to her, she should go through life bearing the handicap of being a Jew; for it was a handicap, undeniably, she felt. Her cousins, Agatha and Bridgie Broadstream, with whom she had talked it over, agreed with her; and she knew that her Aunt Irene would have agreed with her too; and, too, she knew that her Uncle Philip would not.

For Dr. Philip Broadstream, though he had changed his name from Breitenbach, had never relinquished his identity as a Jew. That change, the price of Irene Langdon's consent to marry him, had been merely a translation involving no change of faith. The doctor was a silent, reserved man, appearing only at meals—when his work did not interfere—his brown eyes behind rimless spectacles seeming perpetually to disapprove of something; but of what, Mimi had never been quite sure. And when she first came to live with them, Mimi had shared with his daughters a palpable desire to avoid him whenever possible. But

within the last three years, because of his illness or her own growth into womanhood, she had succeeded in penetrating that reserve which in the bosom of his family always enshrouded him, seeing him as his patients saw him—warm, sympathetic, quizzically humorous. And a delightful comradeship had sprung up between them, until she wondered why, as a youngster, she had stood so terribly in awe of him; how, as a youngster, she had come so readily to join the family league against him.

When she was sixteen years old Clifford Van Buskirk, or Van, as he was known in the football heavens where he was a rapidly ascending star, all unwittingly usurped the stellar rôle in the dreams of Mimi Heller. Night after night her dark head with the two heavy, unruly braids would sink into her pillow full of thoughts of the blond young athlete, and she would drift into slumber on vague, delicious dreams of him, her bright gray eyes beneath the heavy black fringe of lash luminous with his image. At that time his picture, torn from the newspapers, adorned the dressers of half the season's crop of subdebs. But long after all the other frames had disgorged his image to enshrine the likenesses of newer heroes—or mere fiancés—the silver frame on Mimi's gray enameled dresser still contained a badly faded picture of Clifford Van Buskirk in football togs.

It was while he was in a captain's uniform and she was helping at a canteen that Mimi met him for the first time; and a swift, cloudless courtship blossomed rapidly into an engagement—a secret one, of course,

because of his mother. There had been other girls in Van's life; there had even been a sort of understanding with Virginia Dresser, his mother's godchild; but nothing like this. Mimi's gray eyes, constantly changing with the constant change of her moods, always expressive, always provocative, affected him differently than did any eyes he had ever seen. And the vivid contrast of her coloring—red lips against pale dark skin, crystal-clear gray eyes against black lashes and straight black brows—struck him with a pleasurable sense of novelty every time he looked at her. She had a striking figure, too—small and slender, yet roundly developed, graceful, yet full of sturdy health. Wherever he took her she was a high light—beautiful, vivacious, talented. She combined all the best qualities of all the best girls he had ever known—good looks, brains, poise, character, charm—and still had some of her own left over; which is only another way of saying that he was very much in love with her. And some day, when his Uncle Ray would come across with a living wage and his mother outgrow her narrow-minded objections, he was going to marry her, though a full year had already passed and the thing had not come an inch nearer to fulfillment.

The car slowed down as they reached Brooklyn.

"Gee whiz, Mim," the boy inquired reproachfully, "do you have to go home? Let's go up the road."

She regretfully shook her little dark fluffy head beneath the bright orange turban which called odd tawny lights into her gray eyes and contrasted vividly with the clear pale olive of her skin.

"Everyone's gone for the day, and I can't bear to think of Uncle Philip home alone all Sunday."

"I wish you couldn't bear to think of me home all Sunday night—"

"Why don't you come in and have tea with uncle and me?"

He shook his head decisively.

"You know he can't stand me."

"Nonsense, dear. You just imagine it. He seems that way to everybody who doesn't know him."

"Well, let everybody come back for more of it if they like. But excuse me! Anyway, my old lady asked me to try to be home. She has company."

"Who?"

"Dressers."

"Oh—Virginia?" asked Miriam a trifle constrainedly, and was silent the rest of the way. As he stopped before her door, "I hope," she remarked a little self-consciously, "you have a pleasant evening."

"Thanks. I hope you do too. I suppose your friend Mr. Rosenstein'll be there?"

"You mean David? His name is Goldberg. No. What makes you think he'll be here?"

"He usually is."

"Well, he comes to see Uncle Philip."

"Yes, so I noticed."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing. I'm blind, of course."

With a toss of her head she slipped her key into the lock and went in. How like a man to conjure up a hypothetical affair between herself and David! Why,

Van seemed actually jealous of David—David, of all people! Now she, Mimi, wasn't jealous of Virginia Dresser. Only, of course, she didn't like to think of her there at the Van Buskirk table where she, Mimi, had never been invited—smiled upon by Van's mother in the way she, Mimi, so longed to be smiled upon.

Inside the door she paused and sighed. What an ending for a wonderful day! It was so seldom she and Van had even the shadows of misunderstandings between them! She would telephone him later in the evening. For a second she almost regretted having come home. Her uncle did not expect it of her. For the last year of his illness he had been alone most of the time, and he never seemed to mind it. And perhaps David had come, making her own sacrifice needless. David was a Russian, a distant cousin of the doctor's. He had a ready laugh and a slow, comfortable smile; and though at thirty he had achieved a remarkable success, he had none of the irritating assurance of the self-made young man. He possessed, on the contrary, a somewhat courtly deference which sat well on his big, heavy-shouldered frame and made him much liked among the older women.

Mimi, listening for his voice, heard nothing except her own light footfall up the carpeted stairs, and she felt deepening that curious clutch at her heart that she always felt of late when she stepped inside the house. Perhaps her uncle was—but she put the thought resolutely away from her. She would find him as always, seated before the window, apparently the same, reading or dreaming. As she passed his door she heard his

voice calling her, and the tension lifted. Thank God, he was all right! She opened the door softly and looked in.

"I did not expect you home on such a beautiful day. Are you alone?"

"Yes, I'm alone."

"Good! I want to speak to you. I have been thinking about you."

She went upstairs to her own room to take off her coat and hat. She stopped before her mirror to run a comb through the dark, unruly fluff of her hair. About what would Uncle Philip want to speak to her except Van? For some time she had been making elaborate conversational detours when alone with her uncle to avoid his name. But now she was sure it had come, and it was bound to be trying. Slowly and with a sinking sensation she went down to the sick man's room.

A pang shot through her as she noticed how very thin he was growing, his tall frame more and more stooped at the shoulders. His grizzled beard, which of late he had allowed to grow over his cheeks, no longer concealed the hollows that were daily eating into their contour. Nor did his spectacles hide the inroads which long illness and potent medicines had made on the clearness of his eyes, where white and brown now blurred faintly.

She pulled up the cushioned foot piece of his reclining chair and, snuggling against his feet, smiled up into his face. When Miriam smiled new lights broke into her bright gray eyes, a row of very even teeth shot

out a sudden gleam of white between red lips and a wholly unexpected dimple rippled into her smooth, pointed little chin. But for once her smile woke no echo, and with a deepening sense of foreboding she asked "Where's David?" thinking that would please him.

"He's coming later, I believe."

"David is fine, isn't he?" she continued, hoping to avert the topic she dreaded.

"I'm afraid," he answered musingly, stroking her dark hair with his wasted, yellowing hand—"I'm afraid you don't quite realize how fine—"

A thin coating of ice spread itself over her.

"Miriam, it is of David I wished to speak—of David and you."

The back of her throat contracted, and she sat there helplessly while he went on, every word causing a distaste in her like a spiritual nausea.

"You have much in common, you and David. I have watched you both. And he is fond of you. He spoke to me some time ago, asking me to wait until things happened of their own accord. But I was afraid to wait any longer. Miriam, it is my one wish to see you married to David."

At that she roused herself.

"No, no!" she cried, her voice jangling unfamiliarly. "No, no, Uncle Philip—I—I couldn't!" She cleared her throat, but the jangling continued: "I simply couldn't! I'm sorry, but I just—couldn't—ever!"

Her voice broke off jerkily, leaving the room heavy with an oppressive silence which he broke gently:

"'Ever' is a big word, my darling. What makes you think you couldn't—ever?"

"Because I—I don't care for him that way."

"But—"

"No—no"—her voice dropped suddenly—"I—I—there's somebody else."

His hand on her head relaxed suddenly.

"You mean—Van Buskirk?" he asked at length. She nodded. "I was afraid—" he murmured, and shook his head from side to side. Then he sat up sharply, and some of his old decision of manner came back to him. "You must forget him, Miriam. It will never do."

She did not know what to say.

"Uncle Philip," she cried finally, "you don't understand! We—we love each other. We're going to be married."

"Married? You mean you are engaged?"

She nodded eagerly.

"Then how is it," he asked sternly, "I have never been told? How is it he has never spoken to me?"

"He—we—they don't do it that way," she explained respectfully.

"No"—his voice was harsh with bitterness—"and I do not care for the other way—long secret engagements without parental supervision. They permit a man to take the best years of a young girl's life and spend them in the most trying intimacy—until he has robbed her of her bloom—and all the while he is free to toss her aside for someone else. I know that way.

I have seen much of it—too much of it,” he added grimly—“in my office.”

A hot flush of mingled shame and anger swept over her.

“You don’t understand, Uncle Philip,” she replied with dignity. “We both agreed to keep our engagement secret.”

“Why?” he thundered. “Why?”

“Well, we—we’re not ready to get married yet.”

“Who isn’t ready—you? Why aren’t you ready?”

“Well, no—not me. But he—he isn’t—”

“Hah!” The monosyllable burned through her skin. “And when does he intend to be ready—the young lord—to marry my Miriam?”

Her gray eyes black with anger, she flung her answer at him:

“He’s not in a position to. Three years in the Army didn’t advance him very far in business. And besides”—she caught her red lower lip beneath a square white upper tooth—“well, there’s his mother.”

“What’s the matter with his mother?” he demanded, and answered for her: “His mother doesn’t want you—isn’t that it?—because you’re a Jew!”

Her tight-lipped silence offered no contradiction.

“I wouldn’t marry into a family that didn’t want me!” he told her scornfully.

“I’m not marrying the family!” she responded hotly, her eyes still dark. “I’m marrying Clifford!”

“It looks that way,” he retorted, and for the first time in her life she hated him. “No, Miriam, if you were not marrying the family you would be Mrs. Van

Buskirk already—or at least the future Mrs. Van Buskirk.”

“I am—I am the future Mrs. Van Buskirk.”

“In whose eyes, except your own? How can you be so blind? You are Miriam Heller—no more, no less. And if five years from now he has failed to win his mother’s consent—or tired of you—you will still be Miriam Heller. I dare say he has been careful to see to that.”

She was about to answer angrily, but he glanced down at her ringless finger with so much meaning that she snatched it away with a sudden shamed self-consciousness. And now she tried deliberately to shut her mind against what he was saying. She did not want to hear.

“If you love him and he wants to marry you, let him come to me like a man and tell me so. If it is a question of money, you will not have to wait until I am dead for yours. You can have it now. Only he must come to me openly—like a man. This secret business I forbid. Do you hear?” His voice rose angrily. “You tell him he must come to me and tell me that he intends to take care of you—to marry you—or—”

She shook her head. She knew Clifford would not.

“Then he cannot have you!” the doctor cried. “Do you hear? I am surprised at you, Miriam—to let a man put you in such a position! You, a Jewish girl—”

“I’m not a Jewish girl!”

“Not a— What then?”

"I'm an atheist."

He laughed. Then sobering suddenly, "My poor little Miriam," he said, and his patronage was more intolerable than his laughter.

"I am," she went on hotly—"I'm an atheist! I don't believe in the Jewish religion. I didn't ask to be born a Jew, and so I don't see why I should be made to suffer for something I—"

"Suffer, Miriam?"

"Yes, suffer. If you're a Jew you're a sort of outcast and other people look down on you. I don't want to be looked down on for something that isn't my fault. I don't follow the Jewish customs or anything. Even if I loved David, I wouldn't marry him and be Mrs. Goldberg. I'm twenty-two, and I guess I'm old enough to pick out what I want to be."

"Wait—a—minute," his voice sounding very gentle after her outburst—"wait a minute." And he went on musingly to himself:

"We think our children's minds are summer pools reflecting blue skies and sunlight, and they are bogs—dark unhealthy bogs! It is my fault"—his voice rose—"for having left you so long to absorb this rotten poison of bigotry and smallness and lies! You say," he went on, his eyes gleaming sternly out of his bearded, cavernous face, "you can pick out what you want to be? Too late! A thousand years too late! Not what you will be, but how well you will be it—that is all that has been left for you to pick out. The rest was all decided for you by something greater than your will."

"I don't believe in God," she interposed firmly.

"And who is talking of God?" he inquired. "Have you then never thought of heredity?" And as she looked at him with wide eyes: "Has not your young man told you you are beautiful? You owe that beauty to your Jewish ancestry. Your eyes, your beautiful gray eyes—they were in your father's family for generations. Jewish eyes burn and sparkle and smolder with generations of Jewish suffering; they melt and soften and move with generations of Jewish tears. Has not your Clifford told you you have a lovely form? Tell him it is from your Jewish mother you have it—from Bella Breitenbach and her Jewish mother before her! Jewish women mature early into that rounded fullness of development.

"You have a fine mind—clear, quick, honest—and the moral stamina that will make you the kind of wife any man should be proud to have at the head of his home. Are these a heritage to be ashamed of? No! If you could choose your birth you would have the right to pick out whatever you wanted to be. But since it has all been picked out for you, and since you have accepted all the richness that has come into your life through your Jewish blood, then be ashamed to be false to that blood! Since you have not blushed to profit by your great and wonderful heritage, then be ashamed to blush for its source! Be ashamed to let others dare to blush for it!

"You are young, Miriam—only a child. How should you know these things? I did not know them either at your age." He looked out with weary brown

eyes over the housetops. "I never thought to open again the bitter pages of my life. But if it will spare you the pain of learning, as I had to learn, through the blood of your heart—Mimi"—he broke in on himself passionately—"do not make the mistake I made! A marriage like mine where there is no love, no respect, no companionship; where everything is misunderstood and perverted; where everything beautiful and sacred is trampled underfoot and everything false and tawdry raised up and worshiped; where your pride is a quivering, bleeding thing, your affections starved, your ambitions withered; where every day deals you fresh wounds and every hour reopens the old. Life holds no greater hell than such a marriage!"

Miriam's eyes were wide gray mirrors of pain and unbelief.

"You think I exaggerate—that my life has seemed smooth, peaceful, contented? Yes, because I learned early to dry up the springs of pain, and that means to cease living. It was my pride to keep it from the world! But there were years when I hated her so I could have killed her!"

Involuntarily she drew back to look at him, her straight black brows arching over incredulous eyes. He relaxed abruptly, shrugging his wasted shoulders wearily.

"But all things wear thin in life, especially hate. When I had closed myself against her so that she could no longer hurt me I did not hate her any more. Though she made a mockery of my life, though she stood between me and all the things I might have

been, even though she built up a wall of prejudice between me and my children—I do not hate her any more. Why should I—now?”

He lapsed into a dreamy, almost impersonal manner, a little half smile playing about his lips.

“Ah, but long ago, when I was young—the dreams and the high hopes and the love of life! Your mother—there was a woman! There were willing hands and a brave heart! I, Philip Breitenbach, friendless, penniless—I wanted to be a great doctor! It seemed like an impossible dream. But her courage never faltered. How we worked and I studied, and little by little we saved until I could buy the store! And together we tended it and saved more and I studied more until I went to Bellevue, and then she took care of it all alone.” He lost himself in reverie, his eyes soft with the old forgotten dreams and hopes and affections.

“And you gave her the store for a wedding present,” Miriam reminded him gratefully.

“She had more than earned it. Child, with a woman like your mother—a good woman to understand and be patient and brave—I would have risen to the top—the very top! But I always had to take the moneyed way. It was always money—money to compensate for the shame of having married a Jew! No patience for the things whereby a man may make for himself a name and rise in later years to a position of respect. No! Make money! Move in the proper circle! Kiss the feet of the rich! Waste no time on the poor! Smile, cringe, fawn—always, always! Never a moment for the people who might bring a little color

into living—a little meaning! Never a moment to stand face to face with your own soul! She made me break my life into little bits and feed them to her vanity! She was a leech, I tell you! She sucked my strength and gave me nothing in return—nothing!

“I never thought”—the tenseness was gone from his voice and manner, and he shook his head at his own theatricalism—“that I would speak like this! But I love you, Miriam, better than my own. You are sweeter, warmer, truer. Though,” he added defensively, “I could have made something of them, too, if she had not come in between; if she had not poisoned their minds against me. When they were little—very, very little”—a thin film of tears blurred his unseeing eyes—“they used to cling to me with their little warm arms round my neck. But she made them ashamed of their Jewish father!” His voice had risen to a sobbing crescendo, and he broke off abruptly, wiping away the tears with a shamed motion of the back of his hand. “But between us, Miriam,” he went on quietly, “there is a bond which nothing can sever. We are both Jews. You can see for yourself what a bond that is, outwearing the tie which binds a father to his children!” He regarded her tenderly.

“You are like your dear mother, Miriam—honest, loyal, a home maker.”

She felt a pang for poor Uncle Philip, who thought her honest and loyal when she knew she was neither. It is common with the young to think that nobody can understand them, when it is only they who do not

understand themselves, attributing to themselves unreal virtues and exaggerated vice.

"A little self-willed, too, like her. I realize the danger of trying to drive you. Perhaps David was right, and you would have come to it in time. But I feel now that I cannot wait any longer. Miriam, you must give up this foolish fancy!"

Instantly she was in arms against him.

"It's not a foolish fancy! I love Clifford!"

"Love—love! He is a pretty boy, I grant you, and you may be romantically attracted to him. But marriage must mean more than that! Marriage must mean that one shall love what the other loves; that one shall not mock what the other holds sacred; that both shall strive for the same things, respect the same principles, serve the same gods."

"I do love Clifford!" she repeated firmly. "Just because he's not a Jew you—"

"No, no, darling, not because he isn't a Jew! There are intermarriages which are perfect. But they are founded on mutual understanding, mutual respect. If I thought your young man was marrying you, admiring and loving you for what you are, and not in spite of it, I would not interfere. But scrape off the veneer once and find out for yourself what he thinks of you—what he thinks of your Jewish blood, which is you. I know! He does not respect you. He is ashamed—apologetic. You yourself are ashamed—apologetic. And if he does not respect you and you do not respect yourself—oh, my darling, what a life!

"You must face life squarely. Do not say 'I am

not a Jew.' That is a lie. Or if you must lie, then lean the other way and say, 'I am a Jew and I am proud of it!' Then at least you will respect yourself, and others will respect you. To be a Jew does not mean to be called Levy or to have a long nose or to speak with an accent. To be a Jew means that in your veins flow generations of Jewish blood, and to be false to that blood is to be false to yourself!"

He was completely carried out of himself. He was no longer a sick old man talking to his niece, but a prophet bearing a great message from a great race to its wavering young. Miriam, too, was carried away, but as a spectator at some gripping play is moved and carried away, vibrating in response to the drama, but in a detached way, her personal ego untouched, intact. But his next words changed all that, tearing her from the comfortable seat of the spectator and flinging her upon the stage.

"Miriam," her uncle was saying in his natural voice once more, "I have not much longer to live. My days are indeed numbered. But I cannot go in peace until I know you are safe, until I know you are not going to wreck your life as I wrecked mine. You may trust me, Miriam. I have contemplated death so long that I am wise, with the wisdom of those who stand apart and watch."

She found herself following his words, understanding them, even realizing in a vague way what they foreshadowed, but without any capacity for assimilating them. They seemed to enter her mind and then glance off, unable to deliver their cargo of pain. Her

entire active consciousness was paralyzed by the one benumbing, overpowering realization that now at last she was face to face with the specter she had kept so long at arm's length. Now, now she could no longer shut her mind and eyes to it! It had come! He was going to die! Uncle Philip was going to die! He was going to be gone—dead for all time, forever and ever—dead—buried—gone!

"I am not sorry to go," he was saying, his voice seeming to filter through to her consciousness. "There is nothing left for me to do that another could not do as well. It is not in bitterness I say it. I have had thirty useful years. And now at the end I have the peace that comes of knowing I have been of use."

Her fingers tightened about his knees with that human impulse to cling physically to what is going far beyond our physical reach forever. He laid his hand on her head and patted it with his yellowing fingers.

"I am sorry to distress you, Miriam. But it seems to me that you, of all of them, are woman enough to hear the truth. This disease has undermined the very foundations of my vitality; it has sapped my life. In three years they have made no headway against it—and it has made great headway against me. I am still enough the physician to realize what that means. Just how soon the end will come I do not know, and that is why I ask you to promise me that if he will not acknowledge you openly, if he will not treat you with the respect you deserve and I deserve, you will give him up forever. It is the only thing I have ever asked of you; the only thing I will ever ask of you. If he

will not prove himself the kind of man I want for my Miriam, promise me you will give him up, so that I may close my eyes in peace and face my God knowing that I have finished all my tasks on earth."

"Uncle!" She was on the floor at his side, her face buried in his lap, her arms clinging to his knees. "Uncle, don't! Don't say you're going to die! You're not! You mustn't! You can't! We need you, Uncle Philip! We couldn't get along without you—any of us! You're not going to die! You're going to get better! I know it!" She looked up at him with stricken eyes, the tears falling unheeded down her face. "Oh, Uncle Philip, don't go! I love you so much, Uncle Philip! Better than anyone in the world! I know it now! Even better than him! I'll do anything you want, Uncle Philip—anything! I promise I'll never see him again as long as I live if he won't do what you want! I promise, Uncle Philip—I promise, I promise!"

Clifford was waiting for her at the little tea room on Fortieth Street where they often lunched together. As she entered, chic, slim, blue-suited, he rose from one of the blue-painted tables along the wall, and she felt the old thrill of pride in him—his blond good looks, the hang of his well-cut clothes, the glances he always evoked from other women—the old thrill intensified a hundredfold by the new dangers which menaced. And while they ate she told him all about it, softening it and trying to spare him as much as possible.

Poor Clifford Van Buskirk! He really loved the

girl beside him. But she wanted something of him, at that moment, beyond his powers to give. He did not understand her language. Heaven knows he had never claimed to be able to understand women! But he had never thought Mimi was going to turn into the kind a fellow had to understand. That was one thing about Virginia. She couldn't touch Mimi when it came to talent, versatility, charm. But where you left her the last time there you found her the next. And she never wanted to be understood.

He was sorry Mimi's uncle was dying. Darn sorry! He didn't wish the old gentleman any hard luck, even if he did always make him, Van, feel like a worm. Shucks! The old gentleman had always been more than square to Mimi, and Van was darn sorry he was so sick. Hang it all, you hate to think of anyone dying, especially anyone you know!

But the thing she wanted was impossible. To go up to his old lady and just tell her out and out he was going to marry Mimi—right on top of the talk she had given him the day before about Virginia and family and all that rot, and the things she had nagged him into promising her—why, it would kill her! Or at any rate she would throw a terrible fit! Why, he couldn't imagine himself doing a thing like that to his mother! The thing would have to be broken to her gently. It would take time. Shucks, once his mother got to know Mimi she'd be sure to see what a wonderful girl she was, and there'd be nothing to it! He wanted to spare Mimi the pain of putting the thing in so many words—the brutality of telling her

the raw truth. He was trying to be tactful. Miriam, too, was trying to be tactful. And so the talk went back and forth for an hour, arriving nowhere.

At last Miriam found herself saying in quite a calm, matter-of-fact voice, though inwardly she was far from calm: "But if you simply had to take your choice, Van, between telling your mother and—and giving me up, what would you do?"

"Why hang it all, Mimi, I wouldn't know what to do! You don't know how the old lady is, once she gets started! She harps on a thing, and harps till—well, I just wouldn't be able to live in the house with her any more!"

She felt a twinge of pity for him, but also a twinge of contempt. The latter she fought down quickly.

"Perhaps, like a lot of things we dread, it won't really be so terrible once you get to it."

"I can't do it, Mimi! Really I can't! Oh, why did he have to start a thing like that? We were getting along all right together, and now all of a sudden he—"

She shook her head.

"It's not all of a sudden, dear. He never approved."

"But why? Why? What has he got against me?"

She tried patiently to make it all clear to him again.

"He doesn't think you'll make the right husband for me," she concluded wistfully.

He laughed harshly. His pride was hurt.

"Don't, Van dear! You don't understand."

"There's isn't much to understand, is there, about a man thinking I'm not good enough for his niece?" The humor of it suddenly struck him and he laughed

mirthlessly. "If anybody heard about this I'd be a laughingstock. Me, not good enough for—"

His meaning cut across her pride like the lash of a whip.

"It's no worse than your mother thinking I'm not good enough for you!"

He sobered instantly.

"I never said that—"

"But if you didn't think it you would have told her about me long ago."

"I did try to tell her about you, Mimi. I did! Only—"

"Only what?" And when he did not answer she persisted: "Only what? What did she say when you tried to tell her about me? I have a right to know."

"Oh, Mimi," he began miserably, but she looked at him so coldly that he tried to tell her the truth, though it made him blush to the line of his blond hair and he could not meet her eyes, "she said—she said—oh, I never meant to tell you, Mim! But if you make me, well, she said"—he had grown white to the lips—"she said—oh, I can't tell you!"

It was as bad as that! And yet he had permitted his mother to say it; had even gone home to her night after night after she had said it! She felt a scorn for him shriveling all the fondness she had ever felt.

"And, anyway, it's not so. I'm not afraid of it. Your aunt married a Jew and it turned out all right. The girls aren't—shucks, they haven't—well, they don't look Jewish or anything!"

So that was it! Every nerve in her rose against

him. She could have screamed aloud for pain, disgust, nausea. Instead she sat toying with the little blue-and-white napkin that served for a tablecloth.

"I'm going to tell her that, too, the next time she says anything. Besides, we wouldn't need to have any children. I wouldn't care if we didn't."

More shame than anger made her suddenly long to end it all. Never in her life had she suffered so much humiliation. The man she loved was proposing to her that they need have no children because he was afraid of the heritage they might receive from her! He was afraid they might look like her people! She said it over twice in her own mind. She did not want to lose hold of it. Everything else was swimming round furiously, but here was one thing she had straight. She must not lose sight of it. The rest might whirl round—Van, the things she had felt for him, the things she felt for him now, the things her uncle had told her and those she had told herself, this sudden overturning of all her dreams, this sudden loss of all her old desires. But this one fact remained fixed—the man she loved would be ashamed of the children she would go through hell to bear for him! She wanted to go home.

"Pay your check, Van, I want to go," she interrupted him wearily.

"Mimi"—there was real concern in his voice—"everything's all right between us—isn't it?"

She looked at him with wide gray eyes out of a white face.

"No," she replied truthfully, "I don't think it is."

"What do you mean, Mimi?"

"I don't think everything will ever be all right between us again."

Manlike, he was far from the truth.

"You mean you're going to let your uncle come between us?"

She looked at him hopelessly. She was too weary to make it clear to him now. Besides, she knew that she never could. She shrugged indifferently.

"Mimi—"

"I can't help it"—she took the easiest way—"I gave my word. I promised if you didn't want me enough to make it clear to everyone that you did want me I'd never see you again. Well—"

"But Mimi, be reasonable! I've tried to explain—"

She shrugged again.

"I understand! Poor Van," she went on tonelessly, "it's too bad, isn't it?"

"Too bad? Why, Mimi, you don't know how hard this is on me!"

"It's sort of hard—on both of us, don't you think?"

She achieved a little smile with her lips. Inwardly she was numb. Even the one thing that had been so clear a little while before had disappeared, and there was nothing left now but this beneficent numbness.

"But Mimi, you don't realize what this means!"

"Yes, I realize," she answered quite gravely. "It means good-by."

"But I can't—I won't let you go this way! I won't give you up like this—I won't!" One corner of her

mouth yielded to a little crooked smile. "Give me a little time, Mimi! A day—two days—a week!"

"All right—a week."

She knew it could make no difference. He would not tell his mother in a week. He would never tell his mother. Something impersonal in her sat in judgment over him and saw him as she had never seen him before. Let him have a week if that would make it easier for her to get away now. He helped her into a taxi.

"You'll hear from me!"

He pressed her hand and she felt a fleeting response to the sheer animal beauty of him, his blue eyes alight with the exaltation of the moment. But swiftly her judgment reasserted itself and the thrill subsided. She knew she would not hear from him in a week—that she would never hear from him—that he would let things slide and drift as he always had until they broke themselves into bits on the rocks of nothingness. She knew that this was really good-by. But there was no bitterness for her in the realization. She was quite numb.

To-morrow, she had a feeling, she would be crying bitterly over it all. But to-day it did not matter. To-day nothing mattered but getting away. To-day she would permit her pride the luxury of smashing things to little bits, even though to-morrow were to be spent in weeping over the pieces—perhaps even in trying to put them together again.

It was the beginning of July. The Broadstreams

were at their summer home near Roslyn. Doctor Broadstream never left his bed any more, and it was evident the end was near. Miriam hardly ever left him now, except when David came to take her for a ride or a walk at the doctor's orders.

One day they left the car in the road and, climbing over an old stone fence, seated themselves on the other side, overlooking the Sound. She was very tired, and David spread a robe on the grass for her, her white dress and raspberry sweater gleaming vividly in the afternoon sunlight against the old stone fence.

David was a big man, more than six feet tall, distinctly a Jew, though not typically so. His curly hair was light chestnut in color and he wore it parted on the side and brushed straight across his high, rather wide, forehead. He had light brown eyes, set far apart on a broad, square face, and his chin escaped being massive looking by reason of the vertical cleft which all but bisected it.

"How wonderful you've been, David!" There was a little film of grateful moisture across her gray eyes. "I don't think anyone in the world ever had a friend like you!"

"Tush!" he replied, sweeping away an aimless bee with a branch from a near-by apple tree. "Tired children always get sentimental."

He spoke slowly, distinctly, perfectly, the very care of his enunciation, however, marking his foreign birth. Every tangible trace of accent had been painstakingly eradicated, but all the intangible ones remained.

"Don't stop me every time I try to say anything

nice to you. I never would have believed anyone could be so wonderful as you have been. There's never been a moment when I haven't felt your kindness and patience and strength in back of me."

It was true. She had never known before what it meant to have someone always within call, always eager to be called, always responsive to her slightest change of mood, anticipating her wishes, avoiding her dislikes and, above all, understanding, so that she never felt the need for defending herself. Not that he always agreed with her—not at all. There were many things upon which they did not agree. But the discussions which those divergences of opinion precipitated never seemed in any way to shake the fundamental understanding there was between them.

"Really," Miriam went on, "you've spoiled me so horribly I don't know how I shall ever be able to face any trouble in life without you."

She wanted him to say that she would never need to; that he would always be there. Of late something delicate, exquisite, elusive had hovered at times between them, and there were occasions when desire for it made her irritable, emotional, unreasonable. She was impatient for him to break down the thin barrier that remained between them. She knew what it was—that barrier. It was one of those irreconcilable differences of opinion which existed between them. It was the point of view she had acquired from years of living under the influence of her aunt and cousins. It was the fact that she wished she had not been born a Jewess; that she felt that to be a Jew was something

rather unfortunate, something to be lived down if possible; but not so determinedly as she had formerly intended to live it down. Her point of view had undergone a great change of late. But she still could not help wishing that his name were not Goldberg. Once she had even hinted to him on the subject of changing it. She would not readily forget the way he had answered her.

"Never!" he had said, his brows coming together in a straight brown line across his high, wide forehead, his jaws snapping closed in a new, ugly expression which frightened her yet attracted her compellingly. "My name is as much a part of me as my skin or my eyes. I have tried to make it stand for something, and before I die I hope it will stand for something, both as a Jew and as an American. You must understand once and for all time that I am proud of my name! It means a great deal to me."

"More," she had suggested, "than any mere woman ever could, I suppose?"

Men are constantly being put to the necessity of replying to this sort of logic. He had considered a moment before answering in his careful, deliberate voice: "No, I do not think the two could ever be opposed that way. I would expect the woman I cared about to feel that I had done all I could to make her proud of it too." And that, of course, had silenced her and made her feel rather small.

Well, she knew she would never have her own way with him. He would never yield an inch where his principles were concerned, and she liked the feeling

of that. She even liked her own feeling of smallness, of insignificance, of being submerged and swallowed up. It was a trifling matter after all—a name. They were all trifles, the things that stood between them. The only thing that really counted was David. She wanted him. She wanted to belong to him and to feel that he belonged to her. She would have liked him to see that those other things did not matter to her any more, but she did not know how to go about making him see it. He always seemed to overlook the openings she gave him.

"How is Van these days?" he asked, leaning back against the fence so that his arm almost brushed her shoulder. "I hear he called here yesterday."

"Well, not exactly." She was much more conscious of the nearness of his arm than of what they were talking about. "The girls met him on the road and brought him back with them."

"Were you glad to see him again?"

She looked up quickly, but his eyes were on a handful of moss he had just gathered and she could not see their expression.

"Well, yes and no. Of course I was glad to see him, but—" He looked at her then as though he meant to see through her. She was glad. She wanted him to see through her—through and through.

"Of course," she added, dropping her eyes, "I'm awfully fond of Clifford. I guess I always will be. Only—well, I seem to be a different person from the Mimi I used to be when I was in love with him."

"Oh, then you aren't in love with him any more?"

She looked hurt.

"You know I'm not," she replied without looking up, and waited.

"And he," he inquired at length—"is he still in love with you?"

She shook her head, the sun bringing out unexpected hints of red in her soft, dark hair.

"Don't you think, if he were really in love with me, he wouldn't have let all this time go by without trying to see me? I think it was just seeing me again that made him feel—well, a bit cut up. He says I've spoiled him for other girls. I don't know—I have a feeling he'll discover one of these days that Virginia Dresser was just made for him. I asked him not to try to see me any more. What's the use?" She shrugged her shoulders with a little gesture of finality. "Even if I hadn't given my promise to uncle, the thing is dead—quite dead. I seem to have acquired a different set of values."

Again she waited for him to say something, and as she half reclined there, her clear gray eyes on the sky through the branches of the apple tree, she began to wonder what would happen if she didn't wait for him to begin at all, if she turned to him now and simply said: "I love you, David." What would happen? Or, "Why don't you want me any more?" she could ask, and what would he say then? What could he say? Wouldn't he have to—or if she said: "David, I wish you loved me—just a little!" That appealed to her immensely. "David, I wish you loved me—just a little." She did not realize that her face was

mirroring everything she thought, and there are certain expressions a man must be blind not to recognize.

"Don't," he said, putting his big hand over her eyes so suddenly that she sat up sharply, her face the color of her sweater.

"Don't what?" she asked.

"Don't make it any harder for me than it is already."

"What are you talking about?" she asked innocently, but her heart beat suffocatingly against her throat.

"Well, sometimes you make it hard for me to remember some of the things you have told me—unless, of course, you have changed your mind about not wanting to be a Jew."

If he had only put it in some other way! But what could she say in answer to that? She had not changed her mind. Only those things did not matter any more.

"Well," she commenced with difficulty, "if you want me to say I'm proud to be a Jew and all that—"

"Yes, some day you will say—just that. Some day you will feel that any handicap you may have suffered—any humiliation you may have undergone—are insignificant things in comparison to being a part of one of the greatest races on earth—perhaps the greatest race.

"Doesn't it ever seem to you—well—rather wrong for you to shirk your responsibilities, the debt you owe your people? Doesn't it mean anything to you—the feeling of pride, and the loyalty you owe those fine,

brave ancestors of yours who carried on through so many centuries of persecution and suffering just so that you might be what you are to-day?"

"No," she shook her head; "I'm sorry, but I just don't feel it."

It was not stubbornness. It was merely that she did not feel those things, and she would not bring herself to lie about it. Oh, certainly it was not stubbornness! There was not an inch of her that did not ache to yield, to give in, to lose itself in his firmer purpose and stronger will. If he had only gone about it in some other way!

It was two days later that he found her, a black-gowned heap under a tree. When he sat down beside her he found that her eyes were quite dry. But he thought he had never seen such a look of grief as he saw in them.

"Why don't I cry, David?" she asked him piteously. "Why can't I cry? Isn't it funny? He's gone—dead. Uncle Philip is dead. He'll never speak to me any more—and yet I can't cry. Why is it?"

"There, there—you've cried so much you haven't any tears left. It's better this way. They'll come later—the tears."

"David, David, how can you be so calm when he's gone—gone—and we'll never see him any more—never any more again?"

"I don't believe that, dear. I don't believe that."

"David," she cried, "teach me to believe!"

"I wish I could." There were real tears in his eyes,

and the hand that patted her shoulder was unsteady. "But belief is a strange thing. It must come from within. I have always had mine. Perhaps in time it will come to you."

"I never thought I would need it. But, oh, I do so want to believe something now! David, I can't tell you how I feel—in here. It's as if it were a part of myself that is gone, and I can't bear the thought that it will never be there any more; that this place inside me—here—will always be empty! Oh, David, there will never be anybody like him! Nobody can ever take his place, and he's gone forever, and I can't even cry—not a tear!" She looked out with dry, grief-stricken eyes over the hills.

"Love isn't measured by tears," he told her. "We all know how much you loved him, and he knew it too."

"His last words," she said half to herself, "were to me."

He put his hand over hers where it lay on the earth.

"He seemed worried at the end, David. He asked me to see that he was buried—like a Jew. Aunt Irene says he will lie where he wished—next to my mother. But all last night his mind wasn't at rest. Over and over he whispered to me, dragging himself out of the snatches of sleep that we always thought were going to be the last, 'I've lived a Jew and I die a Jew. And, Miriam, you see that I'm buried like a Jew—in Jewish ground.'" She shuddered slightly. "Over and over he said it to me—'Remember, Miriam, I've lived

a Jew—and I die—a Jew.’ They were his last words before he went to sleep—the last time.”

The body of Doctor Broadstream lay in the big front living room of the Roslyn home. Because of his public spirit, his life of tireless work and unstinted charity, the temple in Brooklyn had offered to hold the funeral services for him in order that his hundreds of friends and patients throughout the city might have the opportunity of taking a last look at him and paying him their tribute of love and respect at the end. Mimi, who had not been consulted about any of the arrangements, felt nevertheless that her aunt was justified in declining this honor. The doctor had been of simple tastes, averse to ostentation, and his burying should be of the simplest. But David said bitterly that a life such as the doctor’s should have been fittingly crowned with some such mark of respect; that a private funeral was only an excuse for excluding the doctor’s poorer patients; that now at last, since he could no longer make a stand for them, she was to have her own way about them for once.

Mimi had not shed a single tear. And now she sat on one of the little camp stools in the dining room, which opened from the living room, sunk in apathetic reverie, her black dress hanging loosely from her slender, drooping shoulders. Until somebody whispered: “There’s Doctor MacDermott. Now they’ll begin the services.” And she sat up with a sharp stab.

“Doctor MacDermott?” she asked with a terrible sensation of pain in the region of her heart. “Is he going to—?”

"He's to read the services," explained George Langdon, who sat at her right.

"But who asked him?" she demanded angrily.

"Why, he's been our—"

She did not wait to hear, but turned furiously to Agatha, who was on her other side. "Why did they ask Doctor MacDermott to come? He's not a Jew!"

"S-sh! Uncle Monty made all the arrangements. It doesn't matter who reads the services. They're non-sectarian."

"But why?" she cried in a furious undertone—"why? Why not Jewish services? Why not a rabbi? Uncle was a Jew!"

"Hush!" another voice told her, and the minister entered the room.

At the sight of his vestments—the black robe, the collar—such a feeling of shame, of indignation, of outrage came over her that she wanted to get up, to protest, to cry aloud. She wanted to cry out: "Stop! For shame! How dare you?" But of course she did not; only sat there feeling like a trapped thing, suffering unendurable pain and illimitable grief.

Her uncle had trusted her to see that he was buried like a Jew, and she had failed. She had let them make a mockery of his last wishes, of his beliefs, of his life. She looked round the room—nothing but Aunt Irene's family, Aunt Irene's friends. She caught a glimpse of David, and turned her eyes away quickly.

She felt that if her eyes met his she would die of pain and shame.

And just as her suffering became intolerable—just at the moment when she could no longer breathe be-

neath the suffocating pressure of it—strangely it was lifted from her, and something like peace poured over her suddenly and possessed her. And with it came the feeling that her uncle was there—somewhere near at hand—within that very room.

The feeling was so strong that she did not question it, but glanced up, half expecting her eyes to encounter those of her uncle—the sad brown ones with the white and pupil slightly blurred. Nothing met her eyes, however, except the familiar paneling of the dining room and the unfamiliar rows of camp stools and the kind, gentle face of Doctor MacDermott in low-toned conversation with Monty Langdon. But the feeling persisted, and her eye, still traveling, came to rest finally among the folds of the portières that hung between the dining and the living rooms; and as unaccountably as it had come to her, the feeling that he was there grew into a conviction.

The minister commenced his nonsectarian address. Mimi did not hear one word of it. As the sweet, deep voice dwelt on the life of the deceased, his great heart, his many fine qualities, there began to be heard sounds of muffled weeping—a sob caught in a throat. But Mimi did not notice. She was only dimly aware of what was going on about her. All her capacity for thinking, for feeling, for understanding, were directed toward that fold in the portière.

A sob from her aunt brought her to a consciousness of what was going on. Irritation seized her. She could have strangled her aunt. What right had she to sob? Or any of these outsiders who had never really known him? She, Mimi, was not sobbing, and

she would have had the right to, for he belonged to her, he was her dead.

She felt for the first time that there was a gulf separating her from all these other people. She could feel a difference now. The something which bound her and Uncle Philip and David together at the same time separated them from all these others. She had thought she belonged with them—the Langdons and the rest. But now she knew that she did not; that she never would; that some part of her kept her apart and made her different. But it was not with any sense of inferiority she felt it, but rather with a sense of pride—a great new dignity and pride.

The minister's voice had ceased, and she hardly knew it. Only when someone pulled her sleeve she rose mechanically. The family were to take their last look at the dead. She followed Bridget. But her eyes never left the shadows whence had come to her this new understanding, this wonderful sense of having found herself. And then suddenly she dropped her eyes and it was gone—all of it; the peace, the immunity from pain, the sense of his presence. He was here—here—and he was dead. Uncle Philip was dead, and she was taking her last look at him. A terrible wave of pain swept over her. Her last look! Her last look!

Her aunt broke down in sobs and Agatha and Bridget helped her away. All eyes were on Mrs. Broadstream, and for a moment Mimi was alone with her dead. His last words came to her—"I've lived a Jew and I die a Jew."

Other people were coming up. It was her last moment alone with him, her last chance to do for him the thing he would have wished her to do—would have asked her to do if he could have asked—perhaps had been asking her to do from the shadows.

With a passionate gesture she flung her arms up and out over him as though to keep him from the sight of the others—to keep him for herself. And as she did so words came to her lips; words she had known as a child but did not remember that she knew; words that belonged to that life which she had tried so hard to put behind her for all time. Clear and loud her voice came echoing through the high, bare room, her arms held out to the shadows where she felt his presence lingering—to the shadows where she felt his eyes upon her—no longer sad, but happy, radiant, at peace.

"Sh'ma Yisroel Adonoi Elohenu 'Adonoi Echod!" she cried—"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One!"

She was not even conscious of the stillness that rose in the room; nor how the stillness was broken by a chair hastily overturned somewhere in the back. Only she was suddenly aware of an arm that sprang to life about her shoulders and a voice that mingled tenderly with hers and led her halting accents in the prayer they said—two bereaved Jews above the body of that other and so-well-loved Jew who lay there among strangers in a strange land—the Kaddish—the Hebrew prayer for the dead.

TWO: MARY MARY

FICTION isn't what it used to be since they stopped having good people and bad people. Nowadays a heroine doesn't think she's doing right by her readers if she doesn't have at least one lapsus linguæ in the course of her diary, and your villain has the most conflicting habit of stopping to pet the janitor's grandson on the fire escape. Soon literature will be as confusing as real life, where the good lady on your right, who never misses church on Sunday, nags her invalid husband into acute dipsomania with attendant complications—after each of which, of course, she dismisses the attendant—while the bad woman on your left, who comes home every Sunday morning at a questionable hour with questionable friends in a questionable state of holiness—namely, alco-holiness—nurses her cook through the flu and anonymously sends the furnace man's daughter to musical college. All of which, if you are Dulcinearsighted, and love to think of life as a lexicon, makes it very strenuous and confusing.

Which leads up to the fact that there were two girls whom Bunny Brinkerhoff might have married. Florry would have made a model wife for any man. Mary might have made a model wife for six or seven men if she could have taken them on simultaneously. But Bunny Brinkerhoff married Mary, leaving Florry to lead his brother Guilfoyle to the altar. And the funny

part was that everybody aided and abetted and approved.

Everybody then proceeded to say that Mary ought to be ashamed of herself and a man like Roi Brinkerhoff deserved something better than a wife who was forever dancing, golfing, motoring and appearing at public places—not to mention disappearing from them—with men—men—men; or worse, man—man. But, on the other hand, Bunny himself was to blame for not putting his foot down. Everybody likes nothing better than marrying couples off and then deciding who is to blame—except deciding that both are, which satisfies everybody's passionate devotion to abstract justice, at the same time offering up two victims to the ax.

"Somebody," remarked Florry Brinkerhoff, during an intermission at a *matinée*, "ought to tell Bunny about Mack Mullen. He isn't the right sort of man for Mary to be lunching with, day after day."

"Mary," announced Kit Logan, who was Mary's chum, "is not in any danger from Mack Mullen. He has fringes on his cuffs. And if Mary must have her quart of blood before breakfast I'd rather see her with a man like Mack Mullen, who's so impossible she couldn't ever make the mistake of taking him seriously."

"Well," Marian Gillette commented, "he certainly isn't the kind of man I'd choose to play around with if I had a good-looking husband like Bunny Brinkerhoff."

"Child," sighed Kit, "you're going to break a leg

some day hopping over bridges from such a distance. You don't know what you might do if you ever got a husband of any sort. As for Mary, she has the laboratory itch. When any new kind of specimen heaves in sight Mary gets feverish if she can't investigate him and find out what's on the inside and what makes the wheels go round. And the people who know Mary and love her, understand that and don't go round—"

"Nobody can say I don't love Mary, and I always stick up for my friends," volunteered Florry stiffly; "but I don't think there's any excuse for the way Mary leads men on."

"Men don't need any more leading where Mary is concerned than a six-year-old needs to be led into a lollypop den," said Kit. "You'd have to post a sentry to keep them away."

"Well, then, Mary ought to begin posting," asserted Marian. "It isn't fair to a man—"

"Fiddlesticks." Kit was impatient. "Why don't they stay away if they're such frail blossoms? Of course I admit I'd like to see Mary learn to say no—"

The curtain was going up, but Florry ventured to say in that last moment in which so many important things always remain to be said, that some day Mary was going to carry things too far, and to wonder why it was Bunny never put his foot down.

As a matter of fact, he did, several times. But either he put it down too lightly or picked it up too soon, for nothing permanent ever came of it. Of course he had never done anything drastic like issu-

ing an ultimatum or threats or anything like that, partly from the normal American adult male dislike for scenes and partly from a hazy fear that did he utter such an ultimatum and did Mary fail to live up to it—with the odds strongly in favor of the failure—it would be rather hard on Bunny Brinkerhoff. There were only two things on earth Bunny Brinkerhoff was afraid of. One was that some day he might be called upon to face existence without Mary Mary—so called because she was the most consistent person in the world—and the other was that some day a four-alarm fire would break out in his neighborhood and he would miss it.

Bunny was what is known as a buff, or, in the language of his home city, Toledo, a piker, a congenital fireman. At the first sound of the siren up would come Bunny Brinkerhoff's blond head with the hair all plastered back in molasses-taffy docility; up would go the corners of his blue eyes behind his bone-rimmed glasses; up would go his ears—well, as up as they could—and he was half an inch less than six feet of tense, listening, straining-at-the-leash expectancy.

At the second call he was murmuring absent excuses to the hostess—if she happened to be between him and the door—and by the time the untrained ears of the other people present had sent messages to their untrained brains to the effect that there must be a fire somewhere, Bunny Brinkerhoff was on a trolley or a taxi or haply the non-business end of some fire apparatus headed in the direction of the blaze.

Fireengineticis is just like any other kind of sick-

ness. If you've inherited it it's hard to get it out of your system. One of Bunny Brinkerhoff's earliest and outstandingest recollections was a daguerreotype of his Grandfather Brinkerhoff trying to look unconscious of a red shirt and a tin trumpet. Back in the old Goose Neck days grandpa was Foreman of Niagara 4, which was a pretty important job. He was the boy who used to yell through the trumpet, and all that the other fellows had to do was to put the fire out.

Instead of taking him to the menagerie of a Sunday morning Grandpa Brinkerhoff used to lead little Roi to the engine house, where the chief gave him a hook-and-ladder catalogue after which his mother wondered why her Roisie had lost interest in all the nice sheepsies with all the nice wooly wooly wool in the picturebook.

At the age of seven he took his dog Don to the engine house to be clipped, where he showed such appreciation of the shiny nickel engine that the firemen adopted him and Don on the spot, even permitting the latter to roll to fires with them.

As he grew older, being a lovable youth, he had many friends in all the varied walks of life, as the saying is. But his deepest and most passionate friendship was for the operator at fire headquarters who used, whenever there was a real fire—say, a third or fourth alarm affair—to call up his friend Bunny and give him the glad word. By that time Bunny was rated a regular fireman, with a fireman's privileges—so long as he did not make a fool of himself—and a regular turn-out—rubber hat and coat and boots with water-

proof pants fastened over them, and a badge marked Toledo Fire Dept.

When he came to New York as sales manager of the Vehie Rubber Company the first friends he made were at the engine house nearest the frat house where he lived. Bunny spoke the firemen's language and he used to bring them magazines and candy and cigars and bang rather bad music on the terrible old square piano which the company had salvaged from a fire somewhere. And soon he became pretty popular with the men.

Bunny Brinkerhoff's eyesight, with the aid of his horn-rimmed specs, was as good as anybody else's; good enough for driving an ambulance for a year and a half in France before we went into the war. But none of the idiotic examining boards before whom he came, in his various and desperate endeavors to get into the service, could be made to listen to reason. There was one time when he memorized the chart and so managed to be sent to a training camp, where, however, the darrn fools took away his glasses before he could even glimpse their double-blank chart, much less memorize it; and consequently he shortly found himself back home again, where he alternately fumed and sulked until he learned, between frantic trips to Washington, that the fire department was short of men and an auxiliary force was being organized for the emergency.

Bunny was made sergeant of an all-American auxiliary fire-fighting unit consisting of Frank and Benny, an Italian who drove a fruit wagon and his Jewish

chum, who had run to fires all their lives; a Scandinavian who was the Svenska edition of my brother Sylvest'; a member of the Swiss Salvation Army; and one native New Yorker with a wife and two babies, who hampered but were unable to check his career as an amateur fireman.

For eighteen months this auxiliary company drilled, spent from three to five nights a week at the fire house performing regular firemen's duty—being carried out of blazes feet first; taking a deal with the rest in subcellar workers; Bunny in particular being laid on a sidewalk more than once and tendered the gentle offices of the pulmotor; getting a whack from the negotiable end of a hose which knocked the breath out of him and then sent him after it; and nearly losing a thumb by reason of a two-hundred-pound woman whom he was carrying out of an Italian tenement without having stopped to pry her teeth loose from it. I mean the thumb.

At the end of that time the service was disbanded and Bunny Brinkerhoff received a badge and the indefinite extension of his privileges as an honorary member of the fire department, at the discretion of his captain. And although when he married Mary he moved out of the neighborhood he was still at all times welcome at the fire house and could feel sure of a bed any nights he chose to sleep there—as, for instance, when Mary was away. And sometimes when she wasn't.

Of course Mary didn't enjoy being left alone. And she was always sure that every fire Bunny went to

was going to be his last and she might just as well get used to the idea of a veil though they always did get tangled in her lashes. But she never exercised her wifely prerogative and asked him to quit. Other women used to say they wouldn't put up with such a thing—not for a minute. But then, they themselves were flawless wives, like Florry, who felt that perfection was the stern duty of humanity and who, ever since she had achieved it herself and helped her husband to approach it, had been rather busy at odd moments straightening out kinks for the rest of the world.

Florry was a plump, dark woman with an agreeable complexion and a disagreeable voice, and it was in a large sealskin dolman and an antikink crusading spirit—for surely no really good woman enjoys such a mission—that she dropped in to see the vice president of the Vehie Rubber Company, and open his eyes to what people were saying about his wife and Mack Mullen.

This Mack Mullen was a very dark sheep. Nobody had a good word for him. He was an unsuccessful writer. He was violent. He was unkempt. He was shabby. He lived somewhere in the village, naturally, whence he emigrated only to attend the theater, for the purpose of writing acid articles about it; and to see Mary, for what purpose heaven only knew. He was rude, he was vulgar, he was radical—manifestly an impossible person. And Mary was seeing him every day.

Bunny wanted Florry to think he was not worried. He tilted back his swivel chair against the wall to

prove it. There must have been an immoral streak somewhere in Bunny, for although Florry was his sister-in-law, and an undeniably good woman, Bunny could only with the greatest difficulty maintain his liking for her at freezing point. Most of the time it kept flopping below zero.

So Bunny thanked her for her good intentions and interest—he realized she meant it all for the best—and assured her rather coldly that he knew about Mary's friendship for Mullen, and while he personally did not hanker after Mullen's company—as a matter of fact he could not abide him and would walk miles to escape one of his tirades—nevertheless, he did not feel that he had the right to dictate Mary's preferences.

Of course Florry, filling to capacity a small leather armchair on the opposite side of his desk, understood all that. But did he know Mary had Mullen at the house every time he, Bunny, was out, and also had lunch with him either at home or downtown nearly every day?

No, he maintained, keeping his balance with difficulty since the chair seemed bent on returning, he never inquired what Mary did with her time. It was hers to use at her own discretion.

Why on earth was he so furious at Florry? Shouldn't his anger have been directed toward Mary?

But did he think it right for Mary to go down to that man's studio alone for tea?

Florry delivered this without looking at her brother-in-law, being rather intent on an inspection of her

agreeable complexion in the mirror of her vanity case.

Bunny's chair and his jaw came down hard. And his voice had a strained inflection as he replied that if Mary had taken tea with Mullen in his studio Mary was the kind of woman who could take tea with a man in his studio.

"But that's just it," interjected Florry, closing the vanity case. "Can she? Everybody's talking about her and Mullen and saying you ought to know." She met his eyes frankly.

Bunny began to clean his pipestem vigorously and thanked Florry. If people were talking he would speak to Mary. But, of course, Mary's friends—he gave the cleaner a vicious jab through the pipestem—knew that it was all right for Mary to take tea anywhere she chose; in fact, that anything Mary did was quite above question.

The way he said it—as though she, Florry, had been caught doing something wrong, instead of Mary! It made her perfectly furious!

"Well," she admitted, not without asperity, bunching the dolman protectingly about her plump shoulders, "we know that anything Mary does is quite above question, but you can't expect other people to believe that it's quite all right for Mary to let Mack Mullen make love to her."

Bang! Bunny's fist came down on the desk and Bunny was on his feet towering over his sister-in-law like a very thundercloud of righteous wrath, his rather pinkish face absolutely purple, his blue eyes flashing

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such black fire that in some way his bone-rimmed spectacles grew misty.

Well, he needn't look at her in that way, because Miss Batchford sat in back of them on a Fifth Avenue bus one evening, and she heard Mullen making love to Mary all the way up.

And furthermore, if he was going on that way—calling Miss Batchford names and almost throwing her, Florry, out of his office when she was doing a disagreeable duty just for his own sake—why then, in justice to herself, Florry had to leave him a letter which she hadn't meant to show him at all, because she knew how it would make him feel. After which she pressed her dolman lovingly against her righteously indignant breast and took her departure. He needn't think his Mary was such a saint. Nobody else thought so.

No, nobody else thought so, and yet in some miraculous way Mary escaped the unpopularity that usually falls to the married woman whose lack of saintliness takes the direction of other men. Women loved her—especially truculent colored washwomen and superior saleswomen in the corset department; even wives, probably because she took such pains to make them. And oh, patriarch of tritisms!—dogs and children adored her. You see, everybody—man, woman, child and policeman—was Mary's oyster. And Mary was a glutton for sea food. Hard shells preferred. She liked to crack them with her teeth. The harder the better. That was why Bunny had first come to call her Mary Mary.

To Bunny, Mary Mary was the sixth day in the week. Because after God made her he rested. Not because she was his, Bunny's, wife. Even strangers admitted that they had never seen anything quite so lovely as Mary Mary. She was little and piquant, with eyes the exact color of Circassian walnut, almond shaped, very large and luminous, of a vivacity which seduced the meek and a wistfulness which disarmed the strong. She had smooth hair, which she wore in braids around her oval face and everybody referred to it as black, but it wasn't. It was the color of Spanish mahogany.

Her chin was pointy and her mouth suffered from arrested development. So small was it, in fact, that you wondered how there was room inside for the full set of apparently normal teeth which flashed at you whenever Mary Mary wasn't being wistful. She had dark, slightly tinted skin and a surprisingly full column of throat—for so small and wiry a body. Her lips never needed any lipstick, although she was forever daubing at them out of sheer contrariness. But even she couldn't tell whether she had or hadn't unless she happened to remember. Her hands were full of gestures and she never sat with both feet where they could smite the eye of the beholder at once, and sometimes it would have taken an X-ray to locate either of them.

There had been several hard knocks in Bunny Brinkerhoff's married life, several times when things had grown rather dark before his eyes, but never with such Stygian inkiness as this time. Never before had he

felt so humiliated. Never before had the situation seemed quite so grave, as he assured Mary that evening in the charming little living room of their charming little apartment on the upper West Side. He had to wait until Emily had finished clearing away the supper things from the dining room before he began.

Mary, curled up in one corner of the mulberry-colored davenport, with a yellow cushion behind her head, and invisible as to feet, looked exactly like Mona Lisa caught in the act of borrowing her mother's white gloves for the junior prom. She had on a pink lawn dress, for Bunny's benefit, the fichu of which crossed in a V disclosing the full column of her throat. She did not deny anything, even before she knew he had that letter whose possession he had failed to make Florry explain. Her frankness had always made similar situations seem less hopeless to Bunny.

"Yes," she admitted, "I've been seeing an awful lot of Mack. He's the most interesting unattached man I know. Yes, he is, Bunny—terribly interesting. Of course he has perfectly outrageous ideas, but he has a lovely nature underneath. Very poetic and imaginative and beautiful. Only he doesn't show it to everybody. He just doesn't care what people think of him."

"And I don't, either." Bunny stopped pacing long enough to face her sternly. "But I do care what they think of you."

Mary Mary arched her straight black eyebrows over troubled eyes. "Of course I don't expect people to

understand what I see in Mack. I don't even expect you to, Bunny, because he doesn't show himself to you the way he does to me."

"No!" Bunny's glasses began to grow misty, denoting agitation. "If he did I'd break his neck!"

Mary looked at him. He threw the letter into her lap. "He wrote you that letter, didn't he, Mary?"

Mary nodded but did not lower her eyes. "Where did you find it?" she asked curiously. "In my pocket-book?"

Bunny felt suddenly overwhelmed with the hopelessness of it all.

"Oh, Mary, how could you let a man write you that way?"

"What do you mean—'let him?' " She settled her smooth head more snugly into the cushion at her back. "He just did. I told him not to do it again because you wouldn't like it."

"I wouldn't like it! But, Mary, *you* don't like it, do you?"

"Oh—me?" She shrugged.

"Mary! Don't you resent it?"

Instead of answering she withdrew one satin-slippered foot from the pink concealment of her skirt and regarded it thoughtfully.

"Why, Mary," he burst forth, standing before her, his hands dug deep into his pockets, "it's positively sickening! Anybody can see the man is in love with you! Every line—every word—"

"That's what makes me so sorry for him. When he told me—"

"You've discussed it with him? He's dared to tell you—"

"Well, if a thing is, I can't see the harm in discussing it. I'm not a baby."

"Well, then, stop talking like one! Stop and think! You admit this man makes love to you, and still you continue to go out with him, you entertain him here. Mary Mary, why do we have things like this coming up in our lives? Don't I satisfy you, Mary?"

"Why, Bunny! What an idea! Of course you do. But you always said you didn't object to my having men friends."

"I don't. But you don't seem able to keep men, friends. You let them make love to you."

"Heavens, Bunny, don't get so tragic! You know I don't take that seriously."

"Well, how do I know you take anything seriously? How do I know you take me seriously?" He would not meet the hurt look in her eyes. "You take constant chances of losing me. Don't look that way, Mary. When you go down to a man's studio—a man who is in love with you and to whose avowals you have listened—not only you, but some of the other passengers on top of a Fifth Avenue bus"—she whitened—"you're gambling with my love. Moreover, you're gambling with something for which I have paid rather a high price under the delusion that it was to be my exclusive property."

"Oh, Bunny—how on earth can you talk that way? You know that everything that really counts in me belongs to you."

"Well, you can hardly blame me for not being willing to have you dangle it before strangers as the stakes of a more or less thrilling game at which I know you are a good player—or, at any rate, a very lucky one."

"Bunny! Don't say things like that."

"Why not? Are we to be the only two people in the world who are not to discuss your little affairs frankly? Other people—"

"Oh—other people make me sick. They always misunderstand."

"You bet they do. That's why you ought to be careful not to give them things they can misconstrue into a unanimous conclusion that I'm a fool. I'm not a fool. And I don't think you ought to keep making me look like one."

"Oh, Bunny! Such a mountain out of nothing! You know Mack Mullen doesn't mean anything to me."

"Well, it's even less complimentary to me to think you would take a chance of making me look ridiculous for the sake of any casual stranger who happened to pay you a little flattering attention."

"Bunny—that isn't fair!"

"Well, is it fair for you to do things which make it look that way to other people? If you have no pride about those matters, Mary, be good enough to consider mine!"

"Stop it, Bunny! You mustn't talk that way to me. It isn't kind. It isn't necessary. If there's anything you don't want me to do, you just have to say so and I'll—"

Bunny sighed. "I have said so, Mary; many times."

"I know." She hopped off the sofa and came towards him. "I'm awfully careless, Bunny. I just don't stop to think." She was standing in front of him now, her fingers interlaced, her eyes on the third button of his vest. "You're right. This isn't the first time. But if you'll forgive me, and not be angry"—one finger detached itself and hooked itself tentatively round the vest button—"I'll see that it won't happen any more."

He removed the finger gently. "All right, Mary. I forgive you—again." She winced. "But, Mary"—still holding her hand gravely—"this must really be the last time. It mustn't ever happen any more."

"It never will, Bunny. Honestly." She looked at him appealingly. "It never will. I promise."

"Wait a minute, Mary." He dropped her hand, fending off the appeal in her eyes. "I want to believe you. I do believe you." He crossed in front of her to the table. "I don't believe you really care about things like—this." He picked up the envelope and tore it in half, then tore the halves in little pieces, very deliberately, and threw the whole thing with an angry flip of his hand into the fireplace. "I believe you mean to play fair. But I don't think I can quite trust your discretion."

She looked over at him quickly. He was leaning against the mantel, gazing into the grate.

"You have a reputation for being unable to say no. I will have to safeguard our love against your—your generous heart, Mary. I hate to do it, it sounds so

theatrical, but"—he searched her eyes then—"I shall have to ask you not to see Mack Mullen any more. And if you permit him to come in here I shall not consider it my home any longer. As for going to his rooms—"

"Oh, Bunny—please! Please don't be cross with me any more." She came over to him again, her eyes luminous with something very like tears. "If you don't want me to see him again I shan't. I'll tell him you don't even want me to speak to him if I meet him on the street—and that I intend to respect your wishes."

Bunny steeled himself against her eyes, her softness, her—oh, well, her whole desirableness.

"Tell him anything you like. Only if you ever let him in here again—"

"Oh, Bunny—I won't. I promise you I won't."

"Very well." Still he did not yield and take her in his arms. The situation was grave. He was quite sick about it all. And he knew that for once he must be so firm that the memory of his firmness, or fear, or something else would step in when his love did not seem compelling or potent enough to keep Mary from doing impossible things. "Very well. We will say no more about it—ever. But understand, Mary, the next time you put me in a position where all the women I know and most of the men are sorry for me, I shall simply—well, I shall simply clear out. You can get any man in the world to make love to you, without even trying. We all know it. Henceforth you will have to be satisfied with that knowledge without putting it to the test any more. I couldn't stand having

our life a series of these scenes, with interludes while you were gathering courage to try again."

He had been brutal. But Mary had to face the truth. It was high time she realized what marriage really meant, and that this business of having your pie and eating it, too, isn't exactly feasible. Mary liked having men in love with her. If she could not give up the gratification of that vanity, then she had a small soul and he would be better off without her. If Mary preferred—but that was out of the question. Mary did not prefer. Mary really loved him and she was no baby. All she needed was to have the fear of God thrown into her once and for all time.

And it seemed as if he had been right. For Mary did actually settle down completely, more completely than he had demanded, expected, even hoped for. Mary stopped golfing with men, motoring with them, lunching with them. She devoted every bit of her time and attention and thought to Bunny Brinkerhoff. It was like another and better honeymoon. They seemed to have arrived at a newer, fuller understanding of each other and marriage, even though Mary did poke fun at it all. She was a brazen rascal, was Mary. That was part of her charm.

"I can't dance with you," she informed a perfectly strange man, quite gravely, at a party, "because my husband is so insanely jealous that he would undoubtedly shoot you."


And the strange man was seen to show a marked disinclination for the society of Mr. and Mrs. Brinkerhoff all evening.

Another time she telephoned Bunny at his office to hurry home because there was a book agent going in next door and he was so young and handsome that she was afraid when he came to her she would be unable to say no. And she used to write him anonymous letters to the effect that his wife was on friendly terms with the green grocer, who had been distinctly heard to call her "My dear lady," and the neighbors were talking, and everybody was feeling so sorry for Mr. Brinkerhoff.

But Bunny could stand a lot of ragging, and he was altogether happy; so happy that for three whole months he failed to show up at the fire house. And although he could not help jumping up when the engines went by, he always promptly sat down again. Mary was trying so hard to please him that it seemed up to him to try equally hard to please her. And although she had never said anything about the engine house he knew she had never been quite happy about it.

One Sunday, along towards spring, when Mary had just settled herself comfortably for a nap on the couch in the living room, the engines went by. Well, you know how it is in the spring. At the first wail of the siren, up went Bunny's head so that Mary, who had heard nothing at all, recognized the symptoms, and smiled. And when the next call came, punctuated by a staccato whistle and the ding-dong of a locomotive bell, "Ambulance, dear?" she asked innocently.

"Ambulance nothing!" By that time he was hanging halfway out of the window. "There goes Truck ten."



After a while he withdrew reluctantly, brushing his hands together to remove the dust of the outer sill.

"I guess it isn't much of a fire," he began with fine unconcern.

"Don't you want to run out, dear, and see? I don't mind."

"N-No," he began, when the persistent note of a higher-pitched siren reached them. "Mm," he murmured, suddenly tense again, "the salvage corps."

"Run along, angel cake. I'm going to sleep and you'll only disturb me doing the caged-lion act. Go ahead and get it out of your system."

"Well"—he decided to accommodate her—"guess I will run round and see where it is."

"But don't forget, Bunny Wiggles, Florry expects us in time for tea."

"Tea!" He had to laugh. "You don't suppose I'll be there from now till teatime, do you?"

"No! Of course not! But just in case you should find it getting later than you had planned, do try to get out and phone Florry. You know how intimately her nervous system is bound up in her waffles."

"Don't be silly, Mary Mary." He tucked a cover about her shoulders. "It's not quite warm enough to sleep in such a negligee-ble costume." And when she made a face he stooped and kissed her. "I'll be back in half an hour."

"Better arrange to meet me at Florry's. It'll save wear and tear on your conscience. Besides, I might leave early and take a walk."

He was about to assure her again that he would be back within the hour when he heard the shriek of another siren—the clang of another bell.

“Second alarm. Good grief!”

He forgot what he had been about to say. He forgot Mary.

“Honey,” she called after him, “are you coming back here or shall I go straight to Florry’s?”

It was fifteen minutes before she had her answer.

“I’m in the fire lines,” her husband told her over the telephone. “It’s the Dexter Building, and it looks like a real worker. Guess you’d better not wait for me. I’ll go straight to Florry’s.”

“All right, Bunny dear. Try not to be late. And dear, do be careful!”

But he had already hung up the receiver.

It turned out to be mostly smudge, after all; an excelsior fire, which was handled by the first-alarm companies without aid. Bunny hung round and watched. He might as well, since Mary was not expecting him. Suddenly he heard his name called in a familiar voice. It gave him no particular thrill of pleasure. Florry, who was taking a walk with Guil, had come by to look at the fire.

“Mary’s sleeping, isn’t she?” inquired Florry.

“No,” replied Bunny, “I guess she’s out walking by this time.”

“Walking?” repeated Florry. “That’s funny. I called her up and asked her to walk with us and she said she had a headache and was going to sleep all afternoon and didn’t want to be disturbed.”

"Well"—Bunny thought he understood—"probably she will sleep all afternoon. Mary's an awful sleepy-head."

"I don't think," remarked Florry, and Bunny knew intuitively something unpleasant was in store for him, "that Mary is going to get much sleep to-day because I just saw Mack Mullen duck into Ryder's drug store. And the only reason anybody's ever known Mack Mullen to get this far uptown— By the way, were you coming over to the house, Bunny? If you are we'll walk back with you."

"No—no," said Bunny, whose head was suddenly going round and round, "don't spoil your walk. I'll just go home and—change my collar and get Mary, and then we'll both be over."

Bunny felt it easier to draw his breath the minute she was out of sight. He drew a long one. Almost before he had drawn the next he was home. He had run all the way. He slipped his key into the lock and pushed the door open. That is, he pushed it. But it did not open because the chain was on.

Now there was nothing unusual at all in the fact that the chain was on. Mary, who was timid, always put it on when she was alone nights. But this was broad daylight.

He rang, and it seemed an eternity before she came. And it also seemed to him that he heard stealthy sounds through the partly open door. Then Mary appeared, and she was just as he had left her. And he knew she could not have been entertaining callers in negligée. The whole nightmare tumbled down like any other

well-behaved nightmare at the first contact with reality.

Still, as he followed her into the bedroom he was conscious that all his senses were terribly alert. Had there been the minutest sound, the least unusual sight—his ear and eye would have detected them. All the time he was changing his collar and brushing his hair and telling Mary rather feverishly about the fire and Florry and what Florry had said, he was watching her in the mirror, watching her face for any signs of—well, of anything. But her poise and her calmness shamed while they did not reassure him. He felt he was wronging her. And still something would not let him relax. Something made him keep watching her while she dressed—very quickly, for Mary, hardly stopping to daub rouge on her lips—and follow her with his eyes when she went to see whether Emily had shut all the windows in the rear of the apartment.

And while he watched he had the queerest sensations about Mary. It seemed to him in the first place, that her eyes were veiled, that her mouth looked strained, and in some way she had become a stranger to him. And in the next place, it seemed to him that he hated her, and that, above all, if he watched carefully enough—

And that was how, in the panel mirror of the bedroom door, he saw Mary stoop, far down the hall before the passageway to the kitchen, and pick something from the floor which she crowded furtively into the pocket of her coat. Bunny said nothing but kept watching her with eyes so intent they smarted. And

then it seemed to him that she was indeed nervous and eager to get out of the house. And all the way to Florry's she talked unusually hard and fast. And when he had insisted on taking her coat from her and hanging it in Florry's closet, he slipped his hand into the pocket and pulled out a handkerchief: a large handkerchief, with the monogram MM in the corner.

Bunny did not eat a mouthful of waffle, and Mary did not do much better. Florry, who was no fool—in a way—decided it had, indeed, been as she suspected. Bunny had gone home and stumbled on Mullen and there had been a row.

The evening wasn't so bad as the supper because other people came in, and that relieved the strain somewhat and took attention from Bunny and Mary. And Kit Logan dropped in and wanted to stay overnight because her Bert had just gone to Boston and she was lonely and blue.

"Kit," suggested Bunny, as naturally as he could, "you go home with Mary and keep her company. I'd like to spend the night at the engine house. I haven't been there in years."

Mary looked at him queerly, but said nothing. He did not return her look. It was a terrific load off Bunny's mind. All evening he had been revolving what to do. To face Mary and have a scene was too degrading. Besides, to what end? Mary had broken her word. He must keep his. He had said he would quit. It was just a question of the most dignified kind of exit. There was no possibility of reconsideration or misunderstanding. It was all too ghastly clear.

Once he was safely out of the way, Mary must have phoned that scoundrel. How else would he have known the coast was clear? Whenever he thought of it a lump came into Bunny's throat and his stomach felt unsafe. And it occurred to him that if a man tried he could really cry salt tears. It was all so ugly—the chain on the door, the handkerchief at the passageway leading to the servant's corridor. Mary must have let that man out the back entrance while he waited at the front. There was no question that the end had come. The only question was how to go about it.

And so he was vastly relieved at the simple solution which presented itself. To-morrow, when his head was clear, he would write Mary a note. To-night he was spared the necessity of facing Mary—of discussing the thing while he was still suffering and numb with the smart of it—of entering that house which was no longer home to him. Often in an abstract way he had wondered how he would feel and what he would do, face to face with a situation like this. Would he see red and desire to commit murder? Would he grow heroic and depart with a flourish? Would he become bitter and leave with a laugh? Well, here he was face to face with it, and he was sneaking off silently to the fire house—licked, utterly licked.

They were glad to see him at the engine house, and of course there was a bed for him. The captain was particularly cordial and insisted on having a talk with him. Bunny was in no mood for banging on the old square piano that night, so after he had talked an hour with the captain in his office he wished him a good

night and withdrew into the bunk room. It was still early. A few men were already asleep in their beds. The rest were up in the dormitory playing cards or checkers or reading.

Bunny sat down on the edge of his bed in the semi-darkness of the bunk room, and never in his life had he drunk so deep of bitterness. The bunk room was the ideal back drop for the play of Bunny's thoughts. There was no light save that which glimmered through the transom from the captain's office, and a reflection, on the big brass pole, of the light in the dormitory above. Subdued noises reached him through the opening in the ceiling—the rustle of turning paper, the slap of a palm on a table, an occasional laugh and the undercurrent of humming talk.


Bunny Brinkerhoff tried not to think. He tried to confine himself to wishing. He was wishing for a fire the way a drunkard wishes for a drink. A fire was the only thing that could keep him from realizing all the things—the uncompromising things that were clamoring for entrance into his consciousness. But fires are like any other strokes of luck—they never come when you need them. And certainly never when you sit and wait for them—

But even while he was reasoning so, the joker in the bunk room began tapping out its call. Automatically Bunny began to count. Automatically his mind registered how in the room above him the front legs of chairs came tap-tapping to the floor. You could feel the silence up there. With the first round of four taps he knew. At the next eight he was getting into his

boots and pulling up his trousers, and the men, sliding down the pole, were hitting the floor from the room above. And before the final round of eight was tapped in, Bunny had dropped to the apparatus floor just as the man on watch yelled, "Four-eighty-eight. Madison Avenue and Forty-first Street. We roll!"

He was in terrible pain. It was his face. And his shoulder. And oh! his leg. He was being lifted somewhere and they were leaving his leg behind. He opened his eyes. He had just been laid on a table. He had been in operating rooms before, so he knew where he was. A man all in white, even to a white covering over the lower part of his face, stood at his head and slipped something over Bunny's face and told him to breathe quietly and deeply. He tried to do so and a sweetish smell went dizzyingly up into the cavities of his head, causing them to swell. Also he had a sensation of suffocation.

He became conscious of another man all in white, and a nurse. They did not seem to be paying any attention to him. The thing on his face was keeping the air from getting into his lungs. So he reached up to take it away. But somebody held his hands. He began to fight. Two of them held him down. Then suddenly the desire to fight left him, and it became a little easier for him to breathe. He closed his eyes. Somebody lifted up his arm and let it drop, and he realized in a sudden flash of what seemed like super-human vision that they thought he was unconscious and they were going to cut his leg off. But he wasn't.



But he was.

The next time he opened his eyes he was in another room, a small room, and he was feeling sick. His lips were terribly parched and his face hurt him. Also his leg. He wanted to know what was the matter but he was too tired to bother. And too sick. He wanted Mary. . . .

Again he wanted Mary. And a drink of water. A nurse wet his lips and gave him some ice to chew, after which, with sickening and increasing waves of pain—waves which rolled into his consciousness with the relentlessness of a tide—it all came back to him. He had left Mary—forever. And the fire had been a bad one. His company had been the first to stretch in. And he had been one of the first men in. If his mind had not been so upset about Mary he would not, when they sent him back, have acted like such an amateur. No real fireman would have failed to follow the line of hose. But he had not been himself. He had plunged back through the smoke and suddenly stepped off into space.

It grew clearer and clearer to him. An unguarded stair well or an air shaft. And his leg—no, they had not cut it off. It was still there. In plaster, it seemed. Broken no doubt. Probably a bad break or they would not have given him an anæsthetic. And his shoulder hurt when he moved it. And his face was bandaged; maybe bruised or scorched. Lucky to have come off so well. He had paid his last honors to many a man who had stepped off into an air shaft.

A broken leg and bruises. Long-winded, perhaps,

but not irreparable. But Mary, ah, that was graver! He wished suddenly, passionately, that when he had stepped off into space he had made a thorough job of it and stepped off into eternity.

And then a wonderful thing happened. A great happiness stole over him until it almost suffocated him. He lay perfectly still and simply let it soak in, although it was hard to be absolutely still. His heart seemed to be making his chest bump up and down—up and down.

Mary's voice. Mary had come. She was there—in the room! Of course she was. She did not know that he had left her forever. A weak, foolish joy seized him, and he felt a guilty satisfaction as if he had cheated the devil. Mary did not know. And she need not know—yet.

But still, he must not open his eyes, because if he did he would have to smile at her and she would see how foolishly glad he was to have her there, how foolishly mad he was about her, in spite of everything. And that would make it so much more complicated afterwards—when he came to write that letter. But if he just lay there quietly—and drank in her presence. He was shamelessly without pride, although his pride was not really involved. He had threatened to do a certain thing and he meant to do it. But in the meanwhile—

In the meanwhile, he fell asleep.

He grew conscious, then, of another voice which mingled with Mary's. He wondered what time it was, and when Florry had come. They were talking very softly and he could not catch more than the

mere hum of their voices. But after a while either his ears grew more accustomed to the sound, or they raised their voices, for he began to be able to distinguish what they said. The trouble seemed to be in his own head. When he kept that clear—

"It's terrible!" Florry was wailing. "Simply terrible!"

A fear shot through Bunny. Terrible?

But no. "Oh, no"—Mary's voice was smooth and velvety and soothing—"it's not terrible. But it might have been. He'll be up and around soon, and not a bit the worse for it. One can be a good sport about a husband with a broken leg when one's been as frightened as—Florry!" There was a catch in her lovely voice. "If you only knew how frightened I was!"

Bless her heart!

"Don't I know?" retorted Florry. "It makes me feel faint just to think about it! Why, I thought he was k—"

"I know," Mary interrupted quickly. "That's why I'm so thankful it's only this. Although it will be hard on him to be laid up."

"Well, it's hard on you too. And maybe this will be a lesson to him. In a way it serves him right."

"Don't, Florry! I won't let anybody say that anything serves Bunny right. My Bunny is God's own lamb. And if he has any faults at all they're more precious to me than anybody else's virtues and I'm glad he has them. It makes things more even."

A lovely little warmth suffused itself dreamily around the region of Bunny's heart.

"Of course Bunny is sweet. But I think you ought to put your foot down on this fire business. It's so unnecessary. And he has no right to risk his neck every time some dirty old tenement catches fire. He ought to think more of you."

"Florry," said Mary, "if Bunny thought any more of me I couldn't support the weight of it. Even if I try I can't keep thinking of him all the time. Not all the time. There are lots of times when I don't want to think of anybody but myself."

"That's very selfish of you, Mary. When people get married they ought—"

"Oh, if you only knew how I hate that word! Just as soon as I think I ought to do something there isn't a nerve in my body that doesn't rise up and shriek against it. Here's my only philosophy of life. If there's something he wants to do and I don't want him to do it, and his wanting to means more to him than my don't wanting him to means to me, then I ought to give in and be a good sport about it. But if it means more to me than to him, he ought to be a good sport and give it up. Going to fires is just part of Bunny, the same as liking a lot of men around is part of me, I guess. And for four years Bunny grinned and bore it, because he knew it was part of me—even if it wasn't exactly admirable. But when it began to hurt him more than it pleased me—well, I had to cut it out. At least I tried." She sighed. "I kind of wish I hadn't promised, though. I sometimes feel that if I don't break out in little places I'll break out all over and do something terrible from sheer accumulation of devil."

"Mary, how can you even think of those things! With a husband like Bunny!"

"Oh, well, it's just something inside of me that starts to ferment, husband or no husband. I think I'll explain it to Bunny when he's all better. He's awfully understanding. And maybe he won't mind my playing golf with some of the boys again. I like playing with men so much better than with women—don't you?"

"No. Decidedly not. And you ought to be glad to have women for your friends."

"I am. But not exclusively. I just naturally like men better. They're better friends. Oh, I don't mean good friends like you and Kit. But in general don't you think we women are awfully unscrupulous?"

"I don't like to hear you talk that way," replied Florry. "I think we women ought to stick together."

"I suppose we ought," agreed Mary, "but it's a terrible bore. It's so much easier sticking together with men. I was brought up with two brothers, you know, and I never did meet a woman who was one-two-three to my Bunny."

This in the teeth of the old proverb about listeners.

"By the way," inquired Florry, "was Mack Mullen up to see you yesterday?"

Bunny could almost feel Mary's eyes boring through his lids. And her voice and his heart dropped as she answered: "Yes. He'd been writing and phoning me for two weeks, begging for a chance to say good-by, because he's going away for good; has gone away, in fact, by now. But you know I gave Bunny my word

I wouldn't, so I didn't. Although it made me feel awful to think I was refusing to say good-by to him when I'm the only friend he has in the world."

"He doesn't deserve any. He's a trouble maker and—"

"I know. But I guess even trouble makers need friends once in a while. Anyway, when Bunny went to the fire yesterday, and I realized it was my last chance to do that little thing for Mack and it might make all the difference in the world to him—well, I couldn't resist doing it. So I phoned him and he came right up."

"You phoned him—after promising Bunny?"

"Yes," admitted Mary; "I thought it all over and then I just followed my impulse and called him. It couldn't possibly do Bunny a bit of harm and it might do Mack a lot of good. Maybe the fact that he found me among his enemies will make it easier for him to believe, some day, that the world isn't all against him. And I reckoned that the good I could do him was so much bigger than any harm that I could do Bunny, that I let him come. Only I wouldn't want Bunny to find out."

"Mary," announced Florry, "you deserve to be spanked. Haven't you any sense of honor?"

"No," replied Mary, "I don't suppose I have. They're a sort of impediment, and you don't really need one if you stop and reason things out."

"Mary, I don't understand you. How could you dare to let that firebrand in your house? Why, he might have—he might have—why, there's no telling

what he mightn't have done to you—alone in that house.”

“But he didn’t,” said Mary Mary. “And so you see it was all right. I’ve made him happier and myself happier and nobody any unhappier. I consider it a fair deal. Men never do anything awful to me—well, at least not very awful.”

There was a commotion then on the other side of the room. And he heard something being pushed through the doorway. Bunny Brinkerhoff was a brave man, but a little wave of fear swept over him. He opened his eyes.

Nobody noticed him. They were all regarding the object which was being wheeled in. It was a stretcher.

“You’re sure,” Florry was asking anxiously, “that it’s quite all right to move him?”

And Bunny, surmising that she did not think it quite all right, decided on the spot that it was. Only he wondered where and why—shutting his eyes again, because you seemed to acquire so much more information that way.

“Miss Merley,” a strange voice was saying, “will be right here with his card. She had to get it signed before you can take him home.”

Home? Home? Now was the time for Bunny Brinkerhoff to assert himself. He could not let them take him home. Of course he wanted to go. Being ill in a hospital would be a long, dreary affair. And home would be—well, it would be home. And Mary did not know he knew about Mullen—need never know that he knew. He was convinced there had been nothing between that man and her. And she had

shown her true value so clearly while that miserable pill, Florry, had been saying what she wouldn't stand for. What she wouldn't stand for, forsooth! There was nobody in the world like Mary. Her faults were so much more palatable than Florry's virtues.

But, on the other hand, there was his honor. He had made an ultimatum, and Mary had ignored it. He paid the rent of that house. Surely he had the right to decide who might not come into it. And he had exercised that right only once—once in four years. And she had not respected his wish nor her promise. Her sacred promise. The woman was not to be trusted. That was what hurt. She really had no sense of honor. She ought to be made to realize the seriousness of broken promises. If love could not control her, nor fear, nor honor—what would? What would he be going back to? What did the future hold for him, married to a woman whom he could not trust? And how could he trust her when she had such a weakness and would never make a serious, sustained effort to conquer it? How could he come into his home at night, now that he knew a man had once made such an exit through the servants' door? How could he ever believe a word she said, knowing she held her given word so lightly?

There was another commotion at the door and the thing was being wheeled to his bedside. Now was the time. If he did not open his mouth now—

Bunny opened his eyes. Mary was smiling down at him. All of Bunny Brinkerhoff came up into his eyes and answered her smile. Two men in white lifted him to a stretcher. When they raised him it hurt his

shoulder terribly. He had to bite his lip to keep from crying out. That was what made it impossible for him to open his mouth.

And so, of course, it was too late. And Mary was sitting at his head in the ambulance, and Mary's fingers were twined in his and Mary was taking him home. He closed his eyes in utter happiness. Home, with Mary. What did anything else matter? Honor—and pride—were they not, after all, a sort of vanity? Would they ever bring him the joy, the happiness, the meaningfulness of one hour with Mary? Mary who could make him laugh. Mary who could make him smile. Mary who could make him feel like this. Mary whose dishonesties seemed suddenly more honorable than other women's honesties. Mary who, whatever her faults, was his Mary, his to love and protect, his to pet and adore and come home to, his to help to learn the hard word "no."

She might never stop flirting—any more than he could learn to sit still when the engines went by. But when Mary was sweet to him, and when she was at his side, he could learn to sit down again. Perhaps Mary would never outgrow that quickening of her pulses when a man paid her court. But if he were always there and always sweet to her, perhaps it would be easier for her to learn to take her seat again.

And they would both grow old together and some day Mary would be too old to flirt and he would be too old to go to fires and then—

The ambulance stopped. They were home.

THREE: DIMI AND THE DOUBLE LIFE

"VAN," asked Dimi Brown of his sister across the supper table one night, "what's the matter with me?"

"Dimi, if you're going to start with your tonsils again—"

"Tonsils! Your idea of the adult male is a spoiled stomach bounded on the north by tonsils and on the south by wet feet. 'Tonsils,' says the low creature when I would parley of matters connected with the soul!"

"Oh, Dimi," cried Van, gazing upon him as a mother whose eldest has just betrayed the first symptoms of an inherited taste for alcohol, "you're not going to get that way, are you?"

"What way?" he inquired, though he knew.

"Soulful!"

To look at him you would never have feared for him. There was nothing soulful about his figure, which was five feet ten of healthy manhood, a little too inclined to fill out his custom-made Oxford suit, or about his face, which, though it had never caused a single clock to stop, had not made any movie directors lose their night's sleep either. No interesting shadows marred the clearness of his eyes, which were too blue to be gray and too gray to be blue. And nothing could have been less soulful than his English

mustard colored hair brushed smoothly from his brow. Still you never could tell. Nobody would have known just to look at Mrs. Elizabeth Penny Brown that she had had a soul.

And what a soul—with a color and a classification and an essential environment. In fact, Mrs. Brown's soul had had everything except a license number. Her body was nothing but a troublesome wrapper for her soul.

All the last years of her life were spent in a vain struggle merely to express it. It was the sort of soul that had to feed on life. So they lived in one room and alcove in the West Forties, where behind apricot-colored portières that shut out the sun they were enabled with the help of candles to see the true light.

Mrs. Brown did without a winter coat to buy her seat at the opera. Dmitri and Vanya were fed opera instead of good red meat. In place of milk they were given tea, started in a huge tarnished old samovar. Lacking fresh air, they were completely surrounded with atmosphere. And though the bathroom was not always accessible, being the joint property of two floors, they were always free to bathe in a flow of inspired soul twaddle, which, however, did them no real harm, because they always fell asleep on the couch before the hour or the talk became advanced enough to be pernicious.

Altogether, in some miraculous way they managed to survive it, and in all his thirty-one years Dimi had never shown any real traces of an inherited tendency toward soul. At his mother's death he had quit art

school and plunged into college, where he had shown a quite degraded interest in the development of his troublesome wrapper. Later he had sold his talents to an advertising agency, from whence he had been graduated into the advertising department of Steinberger's Department Store, of which, after his return from the Army, he became head. True, the opera habit still clung to him, but he himself invariably lapsed into blue chords and syncopations at the piano. And though he wrote occasional magazine verse under the name of D. Brown he always called it stuff, which you never do if you have a soul. And the only art he ever practiced was in connection with the advertising policy of the house of Steinberger and occasional sketches which he did for those of Van's customers who wanted something very—very—

Let us hope that the wrapperless shade of Elizabeth Brown never yielded to the present-day shade weakness for the dim lights of the séance parlor, where with shade omniperceptivity she must have winced under the knowledge that her Vanya, in spite of the advantages of her youth, was a mere builder of gowns in a Philistine little suburb like Locust Hills. And she wore rubber heels and tailored blouses with convertible collars. And she had shoulders of an utterly unpoetic breadth, and she strode. Her one great interest outside of her work was in her attractive, up-to-date little stucco house with the goodly attic, wherein were stored the old samovar and the cidevant apricot-colored portières; and a large cellar containing a complete electric laundry equipment. Probably a childhood entirely

clad in undershirts that were surreptitiously and occasionally rinsed in the basin had something to do with her passion for that laundry. It was her one great love. And her one great hate was souls. So she looked relieved when her brother Dimi reassured her.

"No, I'm not getting soulful. I was only wondering why it is no women—no girls ever— Van, why doesn't somebody fall in love with me?"

Van eyed him sharply.

"Dimi, are you in love?"

"No!"

"Then why the anxiety? Do you want some girl to send you orchids or kill herself across the doorstep—and I'd have to sweep her away and face a coroner's inquest?"

"Honestly, Van, if you were just a little funnier you'd be a Greek tragedy." Then he leaned toward her earnestly. "Van, you know it—I've never had a girl. Why is it?"

"Never had a girl! Why, there isn't a girl in Locust Hills that wouldn't stumble over her own shoe laces—"

Dimi sighed.

"I thought nobody but a mother would say a thing like that. Why, there isn't a girl gives me a second thought!"

"Dimi, you're the most popular man at the club!"

"Oh, when there's a sister to be escorted or an awfully nice girl that's kind to her mother to be shown round I'm more than popular, I'm unanimous! But

just let a regular 1921 model appear and just let her get to the point where she knows my heart is white and my name is Brown—and presto! somebody waltzes her right off under my nose and the next glimpse I get of her is from behind the barrage of a large and solitary diamond. Every dance I go to—”

“Why don’t you learn to dance?”

“But I don’t like dancing! Even if I don’t fox-trot, couldn’t some woman use me evenings and Sundays round the house?”

“I think you’d make the most wonderful husband in the world!”

“In some ways, Van, you have a really superior mind. Now if only I could find a girl with your discernment—”

“But, Dimi, you’ve never even tried!”

“I never get a chance to. Just about the time I am girding up my loins some other fellow is opening telegrams of congratulation. There must be something lacking in me.”

“There’s nothing lacking in you. You’ve got everything from nice eyebrows to a sense of humor. And when the right girl comes along—”

“You sound like Helpful Hints to the Homely but Hopeful. How do I know the right girl hasn’t come and gone and married half a dozen other people?”

Van came over to the back of his chair and laid an affectionate cheek on his head.

“You should manifest concern. When the right girl comes along you’ll know it. Meanwhile”—she dropped a light kiss on the blond smoothness

of his hair—"do me a sketch for Mrs. Payson's black velvet. Something wherein daring originality is barely subordinated to quiet elegance." Which he did.

A week later he sold a poem to the American Lyric. He had never taken his stuff seriously enough to try it before. He was foolishly happy with that especial happiness that comes only to fathers of first-born males and men who have sold their first poem to the American Lyric. Untrodden vistas started up before him. Important chapters opened in his life. New romantic futures held out beckoning hands.

He could scarcely wait to tell Van. As he swung, or rather floated, into their very attractive little colonial sitting room her voice attacked him from the stairs.

"Oh, Dimi, Dimi, I've got the most wonderful news!"

"What kind of news?" His question went out to meet her.

"Oh, Dimi!" she gasped against the collar of his coat.

He held her at arm's length and looked at her. She was positively blushing.

"You look," he told her, "like love's young dream. Anybody seeing you would think you had went and did it."

"I have—I did—" she blurted out happily. "Dimi—I'm engaged."

"Oh!" said Dimi queerly and dropped his arms.

"Wh-why, Dimi, what's the matter? Aren't you glad?"

"Of—of course," he lied. "Sit down here and tell me. It's Tubby, of course?"

"Of course not! It's Barry."

"Barry? Lieutenant Barrow? I didn't even know he was back!"

"He isn't. He—he telegraphed."

Dimi gave her a searching look, but there was nothing in her eyes save a queer trembly kind of radiance.

"D-don't laugh, Dimi! Look!"

From the inside of her blouse she took out her handkerchief. And from her handkerchief she took out a knot. And from the place where the knot had been she took out a diamond solitaire.

Entirely eclipsed was the American Lyric. Eglantine, the café-au-lait maid, announced dinner. And when she was out of earshot Van told him how Barry, unable to wait any longer, had telegraphed, a ring arriving almost at the same time as the telegram.

"But you hardly know him, Van. He was only here—"

"A week. But," she went on defensively, "we've been writing ever since."

"But a week! How can you know your own mind?"

"At twenty-nine, Dimi dear, you know your own mind if you don't know another thing. I knew it the first time I met him. And oh, Dimi, I'm so happy! If it weren't for you and the house here—"

"Bother me and the house! We'll get us a house-keeper somewhere."

"Name of Mrs. Brown?"

He shook his head and she reached for his hand across the table.

"It'll be easier with me out of the way. It's hard for a man to get married when he's got an old-maid sister to look after."

"Oh, sure!" he assented gloomily. "You broke up ten or twelve very promising little affairs. I tell you, Van"—his voice took on just a hint of petulance—"I don't register with women. They call me up when they're in town and can't think of anybody else. They invite me to their parties. They even recommend me to their college chums. But they always marry somebody else."

"But you can't expect them to propose to you!"

"Jelly beans! I'll do the proposing if they'll only let me. They're as personal with me as the printed announcement of a sale of barroom fixtures. I only remember one woman that ever looked as if she wanted me to kiss her."

"And did you?"

"No, of course not. She was married."

"Holy Trotzky! Perhaps if you weren't so darn decent—"

"Huh! That's a grand, elegant, uplifting influence you have."

"You don't need to be uplifted. You need to be let down. Honestly you're too high-minded to be human—too nobell—like a dorg," she finished scornfully. "That's just what you are. A girl says, 'Come here, nice Raggsie,' and what do you do? Do you

pass her by easy stages from mild interest to consuming desire? You do not! You never even heard of salesmanship. You go right over and lie down on her doorstep with *fidus ad mortem* written all over your collar, and—well, there hasn't been one girl with brains enough to want you in spite of your virtues."

Dimi sighed. "Tough, ain't it? What would you advise, Doctor Fairfax?"

"First find the right girl. And then don't tax your speedometer getting to her. Give her a run for her money. Slip her an occasional thrill."

"Thrill! If bumping off the road in my jit going at fifty-five isn't a thrill—"

"No, you underdone polliwog, that's not a thrill—that's an attack of heart failure. Haven't you ever even read of thrills? Real thrills? Haven't you ever heard of atavism? Aren't you even acquainted with the genus cave man?"

"Cave man! Van, I'm ashamed of you!"

"Well"—defensively—"that's what got me about Barry—he's so masterful. And on the other hand, look at Tubby. He died of devotion all over the house and on the front porch. And it took me exactly six years to make up my mind that I couldn't make up my mind to marry him. You've just got to make a girl respect you."

"Jelly beans! I don't want a girl to respect me—I just want her to love me."

"But, newborn babe, you can't love a man without respecting him!"

Dimi groaned.

"Nobody in the world could respect a man named Dimi!"

"Listen, Dimi! I'm going to tell you something, because you'd find it out later anyhow. And may it go to show you how little you know. But if you snicker it'll be your last snick. You know Barry stands for Barrow." Dimi nodded. "Well, the rest of his name is—is Hyacinth. But I didn't turn him down because of it. Go ahead now and burst a blood vessel."

But Dimi did no such thing. He did not even snicker. He listened very seriously to everything Van had to say that night and on the subsequent occasions when the talk turned on him and his failure to connect with what Eglantine called the ladies of the opposite sex. He listened, but it is certain he never took the thing really to heart—never actually considered the possibility of a personal application of the troglodytic principle until the night before Nora Barrow left for the Middle West.

Nora was Barry's sister and when Barry obtained an unexpected leave she came to New York for a week to visit an old cousin and to be near her brother. Barry and Van went to meet her at the train while Dimi stayed at home to work on a new advertising campaign for Steinberger.

"We'll have to start her," he remarked apropos of the new campaign whose destiny he was tracing with a yellow lead pencil on yellow paper, "right here. We'll call this—*Nora Barrow*. *M'm*—I'm sure we ought to figure on taking in—*Kansas City*. *I wonder what she'll be like, coming from the Middle West and*

—taking in Manhattan and the Bronx. For ten thousand we can plaster the stuff all over. *If she only isn't too fat.* But you always have to figure on spending more if—*she's a blonde, Barry says.* Steinberger'll kick like blazes when he hears that—*she can't be very young—say twenty-five.* Or maybe I ought to add a hundred or two to be on the safe side. He ought to realize that—*school-teachers are always a little fagged and discouraged, so—you can't expect results too soon.* In about three months—*she might fall for me.* Barry says *she's slender*—but of course we have to figure on the outlying districts. The only thing I'm worried about is—*I hope she's pretty*—J. S. will begin to wail about the expense unless I can convince him that—*even if she isn't she needn't be out of the question—if we get results—*”

Finally, having given up the new campaign, which for some reason would not map itself out, he went to bed. As he was about to turn out his light he caught his reflection in the mirror.

“I've got to do it,” he confided to D. Brown, who seemed to find nothing extraordinary in his having decided to marry a girl he had never seen, provided, of course, she came up to specifications. “I couldn't stand living here without Van. I'll be good to her—and I'll make her happy, so help me Isaac! I'm going to try out Van's dope. No more poodle stuff for me. I promise you, D. Brown, if she's only halfway possible I'll make her marry me—I vow it!”

Well, if she had been only halfway possible he might have kept his vow. But she was so radiantly, so dis-

tractingly, so impossibly possible! Nora! The name was ridiculously inadequate. She should have been Thaïs. She had long brown-velvet eyes that you could never get to the bottom of; utterly improbable eyes within still more improbable lashes. There was a hint of Egypt about her—in the curve of her little nose, her smooth dark hair, her small voluptuous mouth, her lithe gliding walk. Oh, but she was really beautiful! Her voice was beautiful and her hands were beautiful and her teeth. But, oh, it was her eyes that held you until you were supine as the doormat at her feet—more absolutely *fidus ad mortem* than the aroma of cabbage in the hallway of a boarding house. Alas, poor Dimi! Other girls there had been who charmed him, girls who interested him; even there had been girls who moved him. But never, never a girl who did to him what Nora Barrow did. Never!

And the wonderful part was, she appeared to like him too. They just seemed somehow to belong. He did not feel that feverish need for establishing himself in her eyes. He did not bring forth his books of sketches. He did not recite any of his poems—not even the one in the American Lyric. It was just as if there were going to be a time for everything later.

It was a heavenly week. Barry had refused to be dragged round to meet people. And after the first disappointment Van had admitted his wisdom. Dimi respected his grit, though wondering at his nerve. This casual wonder gave way gradually to a grudging admiration not unmixed with resentment. The way that guy got away with things!

With an inborn horror of tragedy Dimi had resolutely kept his thoughts from the fast approaching Wednesday that would take Nora back to the Middle West. In his heart he had a hunch that in some miraculous way she was to be kept from going.

But on Monday night the barometer began to drop. There was talk of trains as though going were a definite thing. And Dimi, though putting off the inevitable face-to-face tussle with the calamity, could not entirely escape the shadow of the coming event. And, to make it worse, Buck Connor and Madge Skelley dropped in. And in five minutes Buck was absolutely ignoring Madge, whom he had been rushing for a month, and was falling with a terrible thud for Nora. And Dimi, being a gentleman, had to try to keep Madge from realizing that she was being thrown. And Nora, seeing him thus occupied, turned her wonderful eyes on Buck. And oh, my friends, the world's worst nightmares do not always happen during slumber!

But after they had gone and he had driven Nora back to New York the sun came out once more, though it was eleven minutes after midnight.

"I hate to go, Dimi," Nora was saying in answer to something he had said, "but really I have to."

"Gosh!" remarked Dimi eloquently. And later: "Nora, don't you think we ought to go out somewhere and leave Van and Barry alone on their last night?"

Nora gave him an indescribable look.

"I think you're the most thoughtful and considerate man in the world!"

All the next day he could without effort recall the

delicious shock this sent through his entire mechanism. He did not draw a sane breath, thinking of Nora and of how he was to take her to Heathstone Inn that night. The atmosphere in the office irked him so that he put on his hat and went for a walk in the park.

"It's too good to be true," he kept saying to himself. "Something is bound to happen."

Usually if you say that over and over it has a tendency to divert Nemesis. But Dimi's hard luck was charm proof. Van met him at the door.

"Where were you all afternoon? I phoned your office like mad."

"I was—out."

"Oh! Well, listen! You know I gave a luncheon for Nora to-day. And Buck Connor dropped in for Madge, and when he heard it was Nora's last day he said we ought to have a party for her. He was awfully sweet. He spent thousands of dollars phoning all round and he's arranged a dance—at the club. Why, Dimi—what's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"But Dimi—you look positively ghastly!"

"Jelly beans! Where's Nora?"

"Gone to get her evening clothes. Buck drove her over—she's bringing a suitcase back. Dimi, you're sure you're not ill?"

"No! I tell you—"

"Oh, well, don't bite! I was going to say the reason I tried so hard to get you was that Nora insisted she had some sort of date with you. We all told her you wouldn't mind, but she had to speak to you. When

we couldn't get you I persuaded her it was all right. I hope you're not going to have a bilious spell. Perhaps you'd better not go to the dance. Buck could take Nora over."

"Hah!"

It was a perfect example of the laugh sardonic.

"In fact," continued Van, "he did offer to."

"Damn his hide!" muttered Dimi between his teeth.

"What?"

"I said, dancing aside, I expect to have a great time. I'm going up to have a look at my togs."

He was decidedly out of sorts. But it was while he was tying his tie later that the real injustice of the thing made a successful captive of his goat. Buck Connor and his double-D dance! The more he thought of it the madder he got. He had a good mind just not to go to the darn thing at all, only then Buck would certainly—

Van poked her head in the door.

"Nearly ready?"

"I am. But what's the matter with you?"

"Oh, we're not going! Barry doesn't care for dances."

Dimi sat down hard! The proverbial camel had not even a straw on him. The way that guy Barry got away with manslaughter! He didn't care for dances! Well, he, Dimi, hated the darn things, but he had to go. Where did this guy Barry get off anyway, always getting his own way? By George, Van was right! The more you gave in the more you got it in the neck. It didn't pay to be a gentleman. You

got left. Be a hard-boiled egg. That was the dope. Cave-man stuff. Van had said it and he had sniffed, but here he saw it under his very eyes.

By Julius, he was going to change! He was going to be a roughneck. "Make them respect you," Van had said. And wasn't she right? If they had had any respect for him, would they have pulled this stunt to-night? By Waldemar, Van was right! "Treat 'em rough," she had said. "Give 'em a thrill!" Gosh! He stopped suddenly. How did you treat 'em rough? And howinell did you give 'em a thrill?

And his sense of humor having suddenly come to life, he stopped being mad long enough to laugh at a picture of himself treating Nora rough. But, on the other hand, if she deserved it? If she danced all the dances with Buck Connor, for instance? By Ignatz, he could have it in him to treat her rough! You bet! It gave him quite a thrill to think about it.

That thrill startled him. Yes, there was something in what Van had said! But where to start? How to go about it? He felt a curious subterranean excitement. What would Barry do, for instance, under these very circumstances? What did Barry usually do? Why, he did what he wanted to do and he didn't do what he didn't want—

Well, he, Dimi, wanted to go to Heathstone Inn and did not want to go to the club.

Having at this moment completed his dressing and being Dimi he meekly switched off his light and went out docilely to take Nora to the dance. And the sight of her in a maple-mousse-and-whipped-cream sort of

an evening dress that did not make even the most transparent attempt at covering her arms and shoulders and ankles and things reduced him to the most abject doormatronage. When he helped Nora Barrow into his very presentable little roadster there wasn't anybody in Locust Hills who felt less like a cave man than Dimi Brown, unless it was poor Eli Bates, who had St. Vitus' dance and rheumatism. He was just a battlefield for conflicting impulses.

Just before he started off, however, Nora laid a hand on his arm. His inner apparatus turned a complete somersault.

"I'm sorry things turned out this way, Dimi. I'd rather they hadn't arranged this dance."

"Oh, Nora!"

"Honestly! I'd rather be going to Heathstone—with you."

Bang!

An X-ray movie camera turned on Dimi at that moment would have recorded a bloody melodrama entitled *The Downfall of Dimi* or *The Birth of a Cave Man* or something like that. On his face, however, nothing showed beyond a slight pallor and a scarcely perceptible tightening of the lips.

After a while Nora asked: "How far is the club, anyway?"

"From where?"

"From here."

"Oh, about twenty-five miles."

"Twenty-five miles! I had no idea it was so far from the house!"

"It isn't. It's right round the corner from the house."

"Oh, I see!" she rejoined, though she didn't. Then: "Don't you think we'd better be turning back?"

"No. Why?"

"To get to the dance."

"We're not going to the dance."

"Not going to the dance? Where are we going?"

"To Heathstone."

The plunge was taken. The die was cast. The Rubicon was crossed, and all the rest of it.

"But, Dimi—" He did not answer. "You're only fooling, of course?"

Still no answer.

"Dimi, please turn back now. We'll be late for the dance."

"We're not going to the dance."

It was not hard after you got started. There was a certain momentum that carried you along. It was like rolling downhill. You gave yourself the first push and some accommodating natural force took care of the rest.

"Dimi, I don't quite understand. But it doesn't seem either funny or—or nice to play jokes on people who are trying—"

"It's not a joke. Did you or did you not promise to go to Heathstone with me to-night?"

"I did—of course—but they—"

"They have nothing to do with it. They didn't consult me about their old dance. I didn't promise to go to it. I don't dance and they know it."

"But, Dimi, that's outrageous! Those people were kind enough—"

"Kind nothing! It's a pleasure for them to dance, isn't it? Well, I'm not interfering with their pleasure. And I don't recognize their right to interfere with mine."

"Why, that's the most preposterous thing I ever heard! I'm surprised at you, Dimi. Even if you don't want to go you might consider my preferences."

"I am. You said yourself you'd rather go to Heathstone."

"Well, I've changed my mind."

"Oh, what a pity!"

"Dimi Brown, you turn right round and take me back!"

"Don't you think," remarked Dimi conversationally, "that Dmitri suits me better than Dimi? It's more masterful. I think I'd rather have you call me Dmitri."

"I'll call you nothing at all. I won't even speak to you again as long as I live."

Dimi's very presentable roadster could hit seventy-five without help from the police, though not always without interference.

"Dimi, stop it. Don't go so fast, Dimi!"

He did not slow down much.

"When I'm—mad," he shouted, "always run—over sixty. Makes me mad—you won't speak—"

His foot went down once more.

"Dimi!" shrieked Nora. "Stop it!"

"Going—speak—me?"

"Y-yes!" she screamed, clinging to her seat.

The amateur troglodyte lifted his foot and the roadster eased down to twenty-five.

"Don't you like to go fast?" inquired Dimi, turning to her pleasantly.

"No! I'm sca— It musses up my hair," she finished coldly.

"When we get out at Heathstone you can fix it."

"I'm not going to get out at Heathstone."

"Oh, yes you are!" replied Dimi confidently.

And she knew that she was. And he knew that she knew it. And oh, it was wonderful—wonderful! At last he knew something first-hand; something authoritative about the long-hidden mystery of thrills. In fact, he could at that moment have written a monograph upon the subject.

It was fully twenty-four hours after Nora's departure for the Middle West that Dimi began to waken to the fact that the world was just about the same place externally it had always been. Incredibly enough, there was the same work to be done, the same number and kind of meals to be eaten, the same amount of sleep to be slept—if one could, of course. It was terribly disconcerting; like stepping off the tail of a comet right into your own back yard. And the worst of it was you couldn't even kick about the dizziness of the drop or the general flatness of the scenery, because trips on comets' tails are not apt to be regarded seriously except by the taker. Actually Dimi found himself constrained to go on acting as if nothing had hap-

pened when everything in the world was so entirely changed!

It was probably a little later that the realization came that nothing was changed. He had spent two afternoons and seven evenings with a very charming girl, to put it in the meaningless jargon of the world. On the last night he had run off with her more or less against her will, and at the threat of carrying her in he had made her yield to his will and dine with him at Heathstone Inn. And at the moment of said yielding there had crept into her eyes a look! Because of that look, melting and burning into his answering look the entire evening, he had had the temerity to drive home with one hand, an accomplishment which heretofore had been to him more of a parlor trick than a useful habit. And in the quietest street of Locust Hills something had happened to the engine which necessitated his stopping, which necessitated her looking up at him with that look still in her eyes, which necessitated his—but only once. The engine then behaving properly, he had driven her home to face the excitement roused by their mysterious disappearance.

Viewed from the point of view of the world it was nothing. Engines stalled in quiet streets the world over. And people, unless they happened to be married to each other, took advantage of the fact, and probably thought no more about it. It did not constitute any kind of an engagement. He might not even ever see her again.

Ye gods!

He would go out to Kansas City, if need be, to see her. Yes, and get engaged to her, too, darn his fool hide for not having thought of it at the time! He'd pack up and go right away if he hadn't promised Steinberger to see that campaign through. He wouldn't be able to get away much before summer, but he could certainly go West during his vacation. Darn it all, August was a long way off! Lots of things could happen in four months. There were probably Buck Connors out in Kansas City too.

Ye gods!

The upshot of it was that he decided to write her a letter and the upshot of that was that he did write her sixty or seventy. And the upshot of it all was that he finally sent her a letter lacking only "Friend Nora" to make it a perfect example of his idea of no kind of a letter at all. And Nora in answering it took her tone from his. So, though they corresponded with regularity and precision, it was as though there had been no night of nights at Heathstone nor any look in her eyes nor any engine stalled in the quietest street.

It was during the fourth week of this Dear-Nora-Dear-Dimi correspondence that Van remarked one night: "It's not awfully easy for you to change your habits, is it, Dimi?"

"M-m-m," grunted Dimi, who was reading and smoking a pipe.

"We've been pretty comfortable here, haven't we?"

"Uh-huh."

"You've always been awfully good to me, Dimi."

"See here, Van"—he put down his book and looked over at her—"are you trying to tell me something or keep it from me? Because whichever you're trying you're doing the other."

"Barry wants to get married," announced Van.

Dimi controlled his face.

"I'm glad to hear," he camouflaged flippantly, "that he means right by our Nell."

"He wants to get married," continued Van, "very soon."

"How soon?" asked Dimi.

"Next month. He expects to be transferred to a shore post at San Pedro and he wants to take me with him."

Dimi went to his room early. He felt very low. Van would be gone across the continent in a month and he would be left alone. For the first time in his life he became acquainted with envy. He simply could not refrain from thinking enviously of Barry, who took from life what he wished, when and how he wished. And little by little there crept into his thinking a wish that he could be as Barry was in order to do as Barry did. And, as so often happens, the wish was sire to the resolve. By midnight it amounted to that—a resolve to do what Barry had done, even as Barry had done it. Of course he did not approve unreservedly of all Barry's methods. Proposing marriage by telegram, for instance, was a bit crude. But the general lines he had followed had been sound. When the affair had reached a climax in his own mind he had put it to the test, getting an answer one way

or the other. This sort of uncertainty was unendurable.

The more he thought of it the more unendurable it seemed. He loved Nora. Either she loved him or she didn't. If she did he ought to know about it. And if she didn't—well, as he was saying, if she did he ought to know about it. He would write a letter at once—that very night.

He did. At four in the morning he was still writing it—and then at seven, when he got up, he destroyed it. It was with the clearer vision of early morning, that his thoughts turned again to Barry—Barry who had staked his all on a telegram instead of a stupid letter that would not be written; that would take a week to answer and could then be answered evasively. He, too, would send a telegram—immediate, decisive, masterful.

At seven-thirty he heard the bathroom door close behind Van. He had not found the composition of a telegram any descendant of the original sinecure. Stealthily he crept into Van's room and with guilty fingers rummaged in her jewel case. He knew she kept that telegram there.

At nine o'clock he visited the jeweler's. There were rings it fairly hurt him not to choose for Nora. One in particular—a square emerald—her birth stone. But Barry had sent a diamond solitaire. And Barry had become his Bible, his Baedeker and his daily manual.

So a solitaire it was which went to Nora, nicely timed to arrive the same morning as a telegram worded—it must be admitted—on the prayerful assumption

that Van and Barry had never taken Nora into the inmost chambers of their confidence. Word for word it resembled a certain other telegram, even to the final exhortation to "Wire yes."

And Nora wired.

After the success of this coup, such was his superstitious faith in the technic of his guiding spirit that Dimi would take no smallest step without asking himself: "What, under the circumstances, would Barry do?" Barry's dope had opened for him the very gates of paradise. And who was he to juggle with the keys? He actually stole Barry's letters and modeled his own upon them. I do not condone this. I merely relate it.

His romantic tendencies he held firmly in leash. That is, he kept them where they would do the least harm. He could not stifle them entirely. For instance, the To Nora sequence of sonnets which later appeared in a weekly, signed D. Brown, could not possibly carry any disillusionment to Nora. And soon D. Brown became a safety valve for all the superfluous sentiment of Dimi.

Barry wrote suddenly that owing to a change of plans at Washington his transfer would not take place for another month. Finally he wrote: "We will positively be married some time in August."

D. Brown was indignant.

"The beggar does not even consult her about it. He's positively Oriental."

But Dimi would brook no criticism of his idol.

"What do you know about women? What did you

ever do except lie down on doorsteps and get yourself walked on?"

Dimi's vacation was fixed for the first of August and forthwith he sent Nora a letter.

"We will positively be married some time in August."

That night D. Brown, outraged, wrote If, the poem which, set by Stephens, was said to be the most tenderly appealing love song of the year.

D. Brown did his best by Dimi. Every time Dimi wrote one of his dearnoraish letters D. Brown gave vent to a poem, and the more dearnora the letters the more ardent the poems. In one month he finished twenty.

When Nora wrote "Oh, Dimi, you're such a real man—so genuine—and red-blooded! There's nothing mawkish or sentimental about you," D. Brown had a fit and wrote three poems in one day.

When she wrote "I heard the great Xman to-day conduct a special summer concert for the Red Cross, but I suppose you are more interested in the Giants-White Sox squabble," Dimi, who had spent money for standing room once to hear the great Xman and was in the habit of giving away his pass for the Giants, only smiled. But D. Brown in righteous wrath wrote his check for his next year's subscription to the New Symphony, which he had been considering forgoing.

And when in another letter Nora said: "I saw a splendid exhibit of batiks to-day, but you probably think they're something to eat, so I won't bore you. Who do you think will win the big fight?" Dimi

replied that he thought the champion would. D. Brown spent the whole day Sunday messing over a batik, which Van later made into a smock. He worked hard to expiate the crimes of Dimi. He even tried to win him over.

"She won't think any less of you because you're not a boob. You're acting like an ass. Try her out."

So Dimi wrote casually in his next letter: "Don't you wish sometimes I were different—not such a low-brow—more sentimental—more imaginative?"

And Nora answered: "No, I do not. If you were one whit different from what you are now I'd love you just that much less. Besides, I adore lowbrows—and sentimental, imaginative men make me feverish."

"You see?" gloated Dimi.

And D. Brown had to use up his energies in chasing up a publisher who would consider including a small volume of delicate love lyrics in his fall catalogue—lyrics which were appearing in certain high-grade publications. But not content with this sort of atonement, D. Brown continued his efforts toward conversion.

"You're deceiving the girl you love," he pointed out, attacking Dimi in his weak spot. "She has a right to know the kind of man she is marrying."

"Of course I'll tell her—later—when she's more used to me and it won't be such a shock."

"Fraud! It will be more of a shock. And, besides, you have no right to marry her under false pretenses."

Dimi was hit.

"Don't you think," he wrote to Nora, "I ought to try to learn about some of the things that interest you—poetry—art—music? Won't it bore you to have to sit opposite a man all your life who can talk nothing but advertising? If you'll just encourage me a little, Nora, I'll go ahead and tackle it. I could really do a lot in the next few weeks."

"Don't you dare," replied Nora. "I hate men who have a smattering of art and music. And if you knew how I loathe men who spout poetry! I like men that talk about advertising—plain Dimi Browns—like you are now."

What could Dimi do? And, besides, it made him feel so happy!

They had a double wedding in August. Van and Barry spent their honeymoon in the little stucco house in Locust Hills. The future might hold few enough of stucco houses for them. Dimi took Nora to a little two-by-four island owned by his friend Chandler, who offered them the use of his bungalow and servants while he was in Canada.

What a place it was for a honeymoon! And what a honeymoon for the place! Perfect—cloudless—ideal—until on the morning of the eighth day D. Brown appeared and looked Dimi sternly in the eye and Dimi knew that he was cornered.

"I'll have to tell her," he sighed. "It's a lie I'm living, and no good can come of building a house on lies. Nora loves me, God bless her, and I love her, and this foolish little farce isn't worthy of our love."

He found her on the porch.

"Watcha reading, Mrs. Brown?"

"Oh, nothing much, Mr. Brown," she replied, attempting to hide the magazine beneath her smock.

"'American Lyric,'" he read, taking it from her.

She reached for it with quite unnecessary ardor. He held it away from her.

"'To Nora,'" he read—"by D. Brown.' Who's he?"

"I don't know," she answered. She seemed strangely excited.

"Maybe," suggested Dimi ungrammatically, "it's me."

Nora laughed a trifle artificially.

"Do you think you're the only D. Brown in the world? And even if you were I'd never accuse you of writing that."

"Why, is it rotten?"

"I should say not! It's the most beautiful—" She checked herself suddenly and laughed with elaborate carelessness. "Some woman wrote it, I'm certain."

"Nora, what would you say if I told you I wrote it?"

"You!" How she laughed!

"Yes—me. Suppose I told you I'd been leading a double life—"

"I'd leave you."

"Joking aside, Nora, suppose there were two mes."

"Well, if there are, you see that I don't catch the other Brown hanging round. I won't have strange men spoiling my honeymoon."

"But, Nora, you might like the other Brown—better than me."

"I hate him!" she cried in sudden inexplicable wrath. "I tell you, I hate him!" Then collecting herself with an effort: "Come on," she called, "let's go for a swim."

That night Dimi confronted D. Brown miserably.

"You heard what she said, didn't you?"

"Bah! Talk! Women say a lot of things. Take her in your arms—masterfully—and tell her the truth. Tell her you did it for love. She'll only adore you the more for it. Women are that way."

It sounded reasonable. Dimi went downstairs and took his wife in his arms. He was so nervous he was even a little rough. She relaxed happily in his arms and twined her own about his neck.

"Oh, Dimi," she murmured chokily, "you're so wonderful! Promise me, dear, you don't ever let anything come between us—promise!"

"I promise," he answered weakly, dizzily. And D. Brown, hopeless, disappeared round a corner.

"This," said Nora the next day, "is my diary," and showed him a little violet-leather-covered book, her face as sweetly pink as the cluster of pink clover she wore in her blouse. "I never thought I'd show it to a living soul. But somehow I wanted you to see it. It's so wonderful not to have any secrets from you. In case there is the tiniest nook in me where you are not at home, I want you to have the right to explore."

Lord love her! Her diary! Moses receiving the tablets on the Mount did not honor them with a deeper thrill of loving veneration than Dimi this mark of

love and confidence from the most wonderful girl in the world. This more than mark of love—this key which would give him the opportunity to unlock his own heart and let her read the stupid secret he had locked there.

“‘He’s my ideal,’” he read, “‘in every way. Oh, I’m the luckiest girl in the world! He’s absolutely perfect. Sometimes I’m afraid it’s too good to be true and that some day he’ll develop some unknown, unforeseen trait that will spoil everything.’” In pencil she had scrawled underneath: “As if you could, darlingest. You who are as clear as crystal throughout.”

Dimi shuddered.

“That is the wonderful part of it all,” appeared in another place. “I seem to have known him before—all my life in fact. I feel as if everything he did or would do were part of a beautiful book I had read somewhere long ago. And if it were not so—if there were to be a false note anywhere the whole thing would come crashing down.”

And again: “That is so precious to me—to be able to anticipate his thoughts—to expect the glow before it comes into his eyes—to read his inmost heart—to know there are no corners where I may not peer—no doors behind which I may not explore.”

He definitely and decisively broke with D. Brown.

Then one afternoon they walked out over the rocks and in a little strip of sandy beach they settled themselves to watch the sea. Dimi with a stick he had picked up was drawing aimless crosses in the damp sand. Nora, one arm thrown up over her head, her

pink linen dress disarranged at the throat, fell asleep.

How beautiful she was, with the dark shadow of her impossible lashes on her soft tanned cheek. His stick began to form the aimless lines into lashes and about them a face—Nora's face. He did not need to look at her. He knew every line and curve of her face—her neck—her shoulders. The sand was not a flexible enough medium for her face. He patted it out and began to draw in her figure instead—her figure as she had stood that morning brushing the living mass of her lovely dark hair, the loose folds of her gown sweeping from her upraised arms.

Suddenly her voice sounded in his ears and the blood congealed along his spine and the stick clung stubbornly to his paralyzed fingers.

"Why, Dimi, what are you doing? Why, Dimi, aren't you clever! Dear, that's wonderful! I never knew you could draw." And then suddenly: "Why didn't you ever tell me?"

He swallowed once, twice, and then the whole miserable story rushed out, the dry-throated words tumbling over one another's heels in their eagerness at last to be uttered.

"Nora, I've lied to you. I've lived a lie ever since—ever since the night I took you to Heathstone. I'm not masterful. I'm not dominant. I just pretended to be, because I thought it was the only way to win you. And oh, I had to have you! There never was any other girl in the world for me! I meant to let you know—always—but always the fear of losing you

kept me mute. I'm not masterful. I'd make the most beautiful doormat in the world if you'd only walk on me. I'm all the things you hate. I was fed on grand opera before I could hold a knife and fork. I draw. I used to make sketches for Van's customers. I even write poetry. I have a book of love lyrics that are going to be brought out in the fall. I'm D. Brown of the American Lyric. I tried to tell you the other day that I was leading a double life, but you said you hated the other Brown. I don't want to live if you hate me, but I'm glad it's out. I couldn't have gone on pretending much longer."

For what seemed an interminable length of time he sat there afraid to break the frozen silence for fear that what would follow might be even worse. Then she moved and he braced himself. But instead of speaking she dropped the little purple book into his lap.

"There," she said in a strange voice, getting to her feet.

"Nora—" he began, his eyes full of misery.

"Read it," she said, "please."

His eyes followed her to the bungalow, but she did not turn again. He opened at the last written page and read:

"I wonder if it can be possible. It seems like a nightmare—horribly clear and yet so impossible! To-day—suddenly—it came to me that I have—and always will have—thoughts—emotions—feelings that I may never share with him. I was reading a poem

called To Nora and I had the most uncanny feeling that the unknown writer was calling me—and that against my will I was answering him. I felt as though some part of me were somnambulating—answering the call of a known but unknown voice—following the beck of an unseen hand—and the rest of me watching was helpless to hold it back. I was frightened—sick.

“And the worst of it is, I may not tell Dimi. He could never understand. And if he did it would make him miserable. I gave him some flippant answers. I lied even and said it must be a woman who had written it—but I know better. At the time I felt oppressed. And since then it has been making me miserable. Oh, I love him! I do! I do! Every bit of me. I will tear out this other side of me if it can cast even the shadow of a shadow across our love. He is perfect. To feel the touch of his fingers is worth all the poems—all the emotions—all the aspirations in the world. I love him. And he is my man. And I will not even dream of shadows. And yet—”

He found her in the room. He simply held out his arms and she flew into them and drew a long shuddering sigh against his shoulder. The miracle was so great they dared not lessen it by speech. But that night they stepped out somewhat from the unearthly glamour of the dream.

“I hope, Mr. Brown,” said Nora, “it’s a lesson to you never to keep anything from your wife.”

“It is that, Mrs. Brown. It’s a lesson not to keep anything from your wife any longer than you can

get away with it. If I hadn't deceived you a little in the beginning I wouldn't have had any wife to keep things away from."

"Where do you get that stuff?" demanded Nora, lapsing into what was to her a shocking idiom. "I made up my mind to marry you the first time I saw you. Since I am I and since you are you, nothing on earth could have kept us apart. Don't you see that?"

"I see," said Dimi.

But it was the cowardly subterfuge of the man who is too happy for argument and not the sincere admission of the man who is honestly convinced.

FOUR: IF YOU WANT A THING—

MRS. BLEYDEN was, above all things, fair-minded. Even when she was most utterly fagged with the drudgery of being the wife of the poorest farmer about Spruce Centres; even when Cora, who was a difficult child, tried her to the utmost, she always tried, because Cora was the middle child, to be a little more than fair to her.

So when the strange automobile came to grief in front of the Bleyden farm and the man gave little Abel a quarter for running for the doctor, and Nella Rose, who was fourteen, a whole dollar for the gentle way in which she ministered to his frightened wife, and nothing at all to Cora, Mrs. Bleyden felt called upon to use her tact. True, Cora, sitting truculently on the gate, nursing her doll, Hester, had refused to help. But, then, she was only twelve.

"Nella Rose," said the mother later, "don't you think you want to share your dollar with Cora?"

"No!" exploded Nella Rose, a small, delicate girl, with much of her mother's inherent kindness and patience beneath youth's uncompromising directness. "She wouldn't share with me, if she had it."

Mrs. Bleyden knew it. But:

"Nella Rose!" she protested.

"Don't want her old money," flung in Cora, and marched away, hugging Hester.

Of course, in the end, Mrs. Bleyden had her way with Nella Rose. She always did. It was arranged that the children should pool their money for a visit to the circus, due at Spruce Centres the following Thursday. Though Cora sulked and would not admit she was pleased, there was an unusual air of good feeling over the farm for the next week.

Until the day of the circus. Then Nella Rose, seeking under the newspaper in the bottom drawer of the old, wavy-mirrored bureau, could not find her dollar. Bedlam broke loose. Cora was at school, and Mrs. Bleyden helped Nella Rose search, and kept her from saying what was in her mind—in both their minds. There had been no strangers in the house. But the dollar was not to be found.

When the two younger children came home from school there was a scene. Nella Rose wept. Abel wept. Cora sulked—sulked with Hester held tightly to her breast. Mrs. Bleyden was determined to find that dollar. She searched the children, especially Cora, though her reason cried against it. Her child would not steal, and no child would willingly forego the circus. What would Cora want with a dollar she could never spend without discovery? Still, something stronger than her reason made her search. Her fingers pried everywhere. At last, she gave up in despair, leavened by a tremendous relief. It would have been terrible to have found it.

Seeing Cora betake herself to a corner with an unreadable light in her eyes and whisper fiercely to Hester, she thought, with a pang of misgiving, that

she did not seem able always to understand the child. There must be some hidden spring which she was at fault in not having reached—which nobody reached but Hester.

Hester was a dilapidated doll that the kind-hearted and wealthy Mrs. Mittelfinger had sent over to the Bleydens, together with an oil-cloth bag full of clothes, when her own little girl had gone where she would need neither. Hester's battered head contained all Cora's confidences. On that particular day, it contained, also, a crumpled dollar bill, and what Cora was whispering into her ear as she fiercely patted down the newly pasted corner of her wig, was:

"If I want a thing, I can have it, can't I? Wait till I'm rich, and then they'll see! Anyway, I showed them!"

There was a day, four years later, when she showed them again. This time, it was Abe Bleyden, her father, whom she had determined to show. It was about the farm work. Nella Rose being delicate, the burden of the outdoor work always fell to Cora, who hated it. But she was big and strong, and they were too poor to support an idle hand. Even her mother did not intercede for her, although distressed by Cora's complaints of unfairness. Cora never complained to Abe Bleyden. Nobody would. He was a man like a lemon that has lain overlong—hard, uninviting, with a tough, shriveled, unyielding surface, and, to those who ventured to pierce the skin, sour and unprofitable inside.

He looked at his daughter as she stood there fac-

ing him, his menacing eyes black with a look his children had learned to dread. But her steady gray eyes, with the clear, black-rimmed pupils, continued to meet his from under heavily marked, straight black eyebrows singularly like his own. It was a show-down. Abe Bleyden had nothing to show.

He laughed sourly.

"Very well," he flung at her, "if ye don' like sowin', ye kin quit," and, turning on his heel, he went out.

"I'll show you," she muttered.

Mrs. Bleyden and Nella Rose, washing up the dinner dishes, could scarcely believe their eyes when she reappeared from her room with her plaid skirt and felt hat on, the old cracked oilcloth bag on her arm. She walked with her deliberate, firm tread right through the kitchen.

"By," she called coolly, and let the door slam.

Her mother, startled almost into speechlessness, seized the door-knob with a soap-slippery hand, apron-covered.

"Cora!" she gasped. "Cora, where you going?"

"I'm quitting," replied her daughter without turning back.

Mrs. Bleyden, after several ineffectual attempts to recall her, stood twisting her apron, while the firm, somewhat over-developed figure of her daughter dwindled into the afternoon sun along the rain-churned road that led into the village of Spruce Centres.

But Cora did not walk to the village. At what was undoubtedly the most prosperous looking farmhouse in the neighborhood, a white house with care-

fully tended flower-beds and a concrete dairy addition, she turned in. The widow Mittelfinger had been looking for a successor to her hired girl, who was about to be married. The pay was fourteen dollars a month, the work no more than that to which Cora was accustomed, and there was no hateful farming. All arrangements had been concluded through Jed White, the traveling huckster, two days before Cora spoke to her father. She was not the girl to discard dirty water until the fresh supply had not only been investigated, but incontestably secured.

As she turned up the flower-bordered path, her emotions underwent a change. The fierce, triumphant feeling of being at last about to "show them" gave way, suddenly, to a weak-kneed timidity in regard to this new life and, above all, in regard to Mrs. Mittelfinger, who had a reputation for thoroughness even exceeding her great kindness, and for shrewdness surpassing both. But, catching sight of George Mittelfinger at the pump, another mood came over Cora, an excitement, a presaging of new and pleasantly unknown things—a tinkling of vague bells somewhere in her future, much the same as she had felt when Jed had first broached the matter to her. Not that she conceived any definite hopes in regard to George Mittelfinger, or "Pudd," as he was usually called in recognition of certain resemblances mental, physical, and moral to a pudding. She was too conscious of her own social inferiority and she was not given to gambling on long chances, even with such indefinite coin as hopes. But, like the sun, his mere presence

shed light over the new life, although his position as richest young man thereabouts, created too strong a glare for concentrated gazing.

This modesty on the part of Cora was characteristic. Her attractiveness lay in a certain clearness of skin, sharp contrast of coloring, and robust development of figure. She did not know that to men she would appear desirable. Her estimate of her abilities was modest, too. She desired, more than anything else, to have money; enough money to "show folks"; enough money to command servants; above all, enough money to have the feeling of having money. She had no special talent for earning it, and she had never heard of acquiring it solely by the exercise of the brain. Therefore, she had modestly determined merely on marrying it. Most young girls of sixteen would have fancied a young prince full of tender fire, with romance, adventure, and obstacles thrown in. But Cora never thought of the prince—or tender fire. And a rich marriage right in Spruce Centres for her, daughter of the poorest, presented sufficient adventure—and sufficient obstacles.

At no time did Cora feel any personal attraction to Pudd. He was, as his nick-name indicated, rich and suety. Yet because of him, she submitted, without protest, to Mrs. Mittelfinger's most annoying traits—her habit of bustling; (Mrs. Mittelfinger was a streak of lightning literally bursting through the buttons of her ample calico dress) her terrific and tireless neatness; her absurd sentimentality; even her trick of being certain just where and when she had left every

cent of her money, and her lack of hesitation about discussing it. Rather a small trait, thought Cora, for a woman who was always giving away so much in money and clothes.

It was in October that the end came. One of the harvest hands remembered laying some change on the sink shelf—although he might easily have been mistaken. Mrs. Mittelfinger (lightning not being in the habit of beating about the bush) asked Cora what had become of it. Words followed, and Mrs. Mittelfinger had the bad taste to refer to previous unsolved disappearances. Temper overcame Cora's prudence. She figured the job was as good as lost, anyway. In view of a certain lingering quality there had come to be in the glance of Pudd whenever it rested on her, she did not care. So she cut loose and told the old lady everything that had lain on her mind for five soul-trying months. Well, not everything. She carefully refrained from all reference to Pudd, although that had been much on her mind, and the shaft would have been pleasant dealing. But it could wait until the veiled thing there had been between them ever since he squeezed her arm in the kitchen, should uncover itself. It would lose nothing for the waiting.

An hour later, Cora was on the road to Spruce Centres, her clothes once more jammed into the black oilcloth bag. But this time, owing to Mrs. Mittelfinger's habit of giving away things, the bag bulged clumsily, and Pudd, as was his wont, perspired freely under the weight, in spite of the pleasant autumn weather. He was visibly downcast, full of humilia-

tion about his mother, full of agitation in regard to Cora, who walked beside him, her head set uncompromisingly straight. She had refused a lift in the Mittelfinger car, and walked with a confident, swinging stride. To Pudd, she was "some figger of a girl," and he was happy in his unhappiness to know he was the bearer of all her worldly goods. But he only thought he was. On her person, Cora carried the most important of her possessions—seventy-five dollars in cash. Being naturally dull, Pudd would have wondered about a saving of seventy-five dollars out of a total of fourteen dollars a month for five months, minus certain obviously indispensable outlays. So Cora had not mentioned it to him. For the first time she felt, with a strange, new feeling of power, that, in spite of his money, she was above him; in some way, only sensed as yet, his superior.

Very much his superior, thought Hank Holden, the proprietor of the Holden House, as he came upon them a short way above the post office. Hank had an eye for women—a little, beady, black eye that gleamed unctuously and unnaturally out of his thin, leathery face, and he thought the Bleyden girl, whom he had not seen for some time, superior to anything in Spruce Centres. "A fine figger" certainly, and plenty of it. He wondered how it was he had never noticed her before.

He offered her a lift to wherever she was going. As she was going to his own hotel, there was no occasion for the further presence of the self-conscious

Pudd, who, in spite of his reluctance to leave her, still seemed somewhat relieved to be excused.

"Afraid of his mother," thought Cora, as he gave her a damp, furtive hand. Something very like scorn came over her—in spite of his income.

They took her on at the Holden House as waitress. Mrs. Holden, an acid woman with a fixed and solitary interest in the planning and acquisition of a tombstone, and subject to "spells," had always managed to separate the establishment from as much help as the unctuous Hank could acquire, and they were perpetually in need of somebody. Two months was the longest record of endurance—held by a deaf Scotchwoman who was a little silly. An angel from Heaven in bomb-proof garb, with gas-mask adjusted, could not have weathered one of Mrs. Holden's spells. Yet Cora Bleyden, who was no angel, even to her own mother, stayed for six years at the Holden House as waitress. It was the mystery of Spruce Centres how she managed it.

But Cora liked it. No other job would have pleased her as well. Counting tips and extras, she made good money, and did not work any harder than she had a mind to. Comparing her lot with Nella Rose's, as she did whenever she went home to visit—driving up in Hank's flivver and wearing store clothes purchased for very little from accommodating drummers' sample cases—she had a fine feeling of being well off, and in a position to "show them."

She met everybody who came to town, and she never lacked invitations to movies or shows. The

traveling men who were compelled to come to Spruce Centres seemed glad of any sort of company—even company that kept its distance as thoroughly as Cora did. For Cora had made up her mind to be very sure of her ground before she let herself in for anything. She always bore in mind the story Jimmie Bowker, the moving picture salesman, had told her about the Holdens' daughter, Lydia. Jimmie had been in love with Lydia, and she had run off with a strange traveling man, who not only deserted her after a few weeks of marriage, but also had turned out to be poor.

Spruce Centres never suspected that it was because of Lydia Holden that Cora stayed on at the Holden House. For once while Mrs. Holden was at church, Cora, who liked to know where things were kept, was investigating Mrs. Holden's bureau, and under the paper of the bottom drawer she found a picture of Lydia and some letters. Mrs. Holden would rather have died than have it known that the traveling man, in addition to being a scamp, had been married. Consequently, although at times she felt tempted to dispense with Cora's services, she never communicated that fact to Cora—not after the first time, when a perfect understanding had been reached between them; not even when her suspicions in regard to money matters had become convictions, and Hank's infatuation was scandalously apparent.

The latter was no fault of Cora's. She encouraged no familiarity from anybody. Jimmie Bowker, the moving picture salesman, used to admire her im-

mensely for that. But he admired everything. He was a slightly bald, blond man without any gift of malice. He used to tell Cora she was wasted on Spruce Centres. New York was the only place for her. But Cora was no gambler. She used to listen to his stories of New York with a little hopeful quickening, but she never cared to take the chance. Spruce Centres suited her. She liked her job. If nothing turned up by the time she was, say twenty-five, there was always Pudd. He was deadly stupid and under his mother's thumb, of course, but his money was not. Cora had ascertained that.

If it had not been for Hank, she might have gone on without a serious thought of New York. The time came when she had to keep out of his way. His twinkly eyes and his moist lips, looking all the more twinkly and moist because of his leathery skin, sickened her. That he should even think she would notice him, threw her into a smoldering rage.

Then, one day, cornering her in the pantry with her arms full of plates, he pinched her. The hot blood mounted to her throat, and she felt a fierce impulse to smash the whole heavy pile of thick plates upon his head. But she did not. It was not her way. She did not even fly into a virtuous rage. There was no place to fly. Only, she wrote to Jimmie Bowker at his New York address. The following week, he wrote back that he had secured her a place as assistant housekeeper at a little hotel in New York, the Lexonia, and gave her directions for getting there. The next Sunday, when she knew it would be impossible to get

anybody to help with the big meal of the week, she put on her hat and walked out.

Her grip, a brown leather one left behind, perforce, by some departing guest, she had taken out the night before and turned over to Pudd, who awaited her with it at the station. She debated with herself, on the way to the station, whether it would be necessary to kiss him good-by. He would expect it. There had been times— Well, if she had to, she would, although now that she was filled with the excitement of new possibilities, his mouth seemed doubly sticky, his hands unendurably damp. No, she would not. The devil with him!

But, then, she thought of the money he had offered her. If he had brought that— Of course she had her thousand, and the cash she had felt she had a right to take from the cash register for the expense to which Hank was putting her, and Mrs. Holden's tombstone money (the old witch wouldn't be any better off after she was dead, whether she had a tombstone or not). But George could easily spare some, and one could never have too much.

Just as the train pulled in, she put up her face for a hasty kiss, and Pudd, gloomy and embarrassed, fumbled some bills into her hand—her hand which was already outstretched—and helped her on to the train.

After the Holden House, the Lexonia seemed to Cora the "real thing," although it was only a second rate family hotel on an uptown side street. As she was not a sociable person, she learned nothing from the other girls. As she was not venturesome, she never

wandered any further than Central Park, to reach which she passed only meaningless brownstone houses. So she did not know there was another side of New York, or rather a hundred other sides.

But one day, Jimmie Bowker called and took her to Victor's. Victor's is where New York always takes its out-of-town visitors. It has the most expensive food, the most sparkling cabaret, the most supercilious head-waiter. Cora was impressed. New vistas seemed opening to her. But she was at a loss how to link them up with herself.

Until she saw Larry Barker—or, rather, heard his story.

He was seated at the best table in the room, nearest the cabaret and farthest from the music, with a woman in evening dress whose dark hair was brushed straight back from her forehead in a way that few women would dare. The Austrian Countess—who was neither Austrian nor countess—was one of the few. Lawrence Barker was an ordinary young man of thirty-three, who looked older and acted younger. He was very big, and his shoulders, from which his invariable blue serge suits hung loosely, seemed even bigger than the rest of him. There was a deep cleft in the middle of his full, square chin. His hair was the color of light sable and thick and straight. His blue eyes were unsmiling, like a solemn child's, even when he threw back his head and laughed noisily. He was not in evening clothes, which would have been bad form, had he not been the possessor of ten million dollars. Under the circumstances, it became merely an eccentric-

ity. To Cora, it mattered not at all. What really mattered was his story—or as much of it as Jimmie Bowker was able to tell her. Some additional details, she gathered from other sources. Parts, of course, she never heard at all.

Lawrence Barker had come from somewhere in the West with a suddenly and spectacularly acquired fortune—ten million, some said; some said fifteen. He liked New York. He opened his heart and purse to it. It opened its doors to him. That is, Broadway did. For a while, he was very happy. Then he began to miss something. He made the discovery that Broadway was not New York—but only Broadway. [This was after he had met Mrs. Van Brot, the widow of one of the old Van Brots of New York. Larry Barker, turning his solemn blue eyes on the problem, began to ponder, with the result that he gave up his suite at the Tarleton and bought The Lodge at Clyde Gardens. The Lodge adjoined Ten Oaks, the Van Brot place.

It seemed a good omen that the day he went to look at The Lodge, Mrs. Van Brot, who was just stepping out of a field gray limousine with little Abigail, saw and remembered Larry Barker, whom she had met only casually—casually, for her. Larry had never forgotten the wonderful slimness of her and the smooth, creamy skin. He used to talk to her often, to himself, and call her Dear Lady.

He did not catch another glimpse of her for some time, although he tried to do so. But Abigail he saw often with an austere-looking person whom Larry

used to call the Lemon Stick. Abigail was a wistful five-year-old who looked as if nobody told her any stories. Larry just ached to tell her stories, but he was afraid of the Lemon Stick.

Then one day, she was alone. Larry, who had carried it around with him for three weeks, handed her a little book that he had bought for her because he remembered loving it long, long ago. He was just about to start, under the most auspicious circumstances, the siege of her heart, when the Lemon Stick bore down on them and dragged away her charge. Stiffly, curtly, icily, without giving him a chance to say a word, she withdrew little Abigail, who, being only five, had reached out an eager hand for the book that the big man, with the dimple in his chin, was holding out to her.

Of course, Mrs. Van Brot had nothing to do with it. But to Larry, smarting all over, it was as though the snub had come from her. It began to be borne in on him that there were always parties going on at Ten Oaks, and he was never asked. There was a large, hurt area inside him, and he stopped calling her Dear Lady—even to himself. Not long after, in the midst of a party at Victor's, when half the girls at his table were drunk and all were very noisy, she came in, looking serenely slim and smooth and creamy. Larry, with a sudden ecstatic suffocation, smiled at her. She did not notice him. He never knew he was insulting her. He only knew that something inside him snapped. He leaned over to the Austrian Countess.

"Go ahead and take that little suite you liked at the

Tarleton," he said. "I'm going to shut up The Lodge and move back."

Thereafter, he was nearly always to be found at Victor's with the Countess or any one of two dozen other girls whom he petted and treated and called "Baby" indiscriminately. He was very gay and not at all happy, except when he was drying somebody's tears. There was one thing Larry Barker could not stand, and that was tears, and he was wonderfully successful in drying them. He had a way with him. There are many tears to be dried, even on Broadway, and Larry found them, or they found him. True, the girls used him at times, as the Countess carefully pointed out to him. But he did not care. He was grateful to them for wanting him at any price. Society had not wanted him at all. Of course, since Society did not want him, he did not want Society, nor its duds (he had put away his evening clothes for all time), nor anything connected with it. But he used to feel, sometimes, a hunger for Abigail, and he could not rid himself of a hankering to tell her stories.

What Cora was able to learn about Larry Barker interested her terribly. Not that she planned, out and out, to capture him. But somewhere in the back of her brain lay the thought that if you wanted a thing—badly enough—and went after it— True, there must be others after Larry Barker's millions. Who was she, a superior sort of chambermaid at the Lexonia—? But Pudd Mittelfinger had at one time, seemed as unattainable, and she had succeeded with him.

She realized at once the need of clothes, so she went to Aperman's and paid (with a pang) a hundred and twenty-five dollars for a suit. Aperman made suits for Mary Wickham, the motion picture favorite. She also bought a good hat and good gloves and shoes. Neither her hands nor her feet were assets, and they must be kept from being liabilities. Underneath, she wore cheap cotton things. She was not spending money where it would not show.

Then she got Jimmie and a bald man from the Lexonia, named Poins, to take her again to Victor's. But the man named Poins grew objectionable, and Jimmie went on the road. So Cora had to think of some other way. She had every other Saturday afternoon off, and she went to Victor's alone. Her distrust of herself wore off as men looked at her. Women said: "Third-from-the-end, last row, heavies." But do men scorn the third-from-the-end, last row, heavies? They do not, and if, in addition to the kind of figure women scorn, she have the kind of vivid coloring they imitate, men will glance. But Cora never returned the glances. She was of an indomitable singleness of purpose. Which is an even greater asset than a third-from-the-end figure and vivid coloring.

Cora would sit in the lobby, where she could watch Larry dancing, walking among the tables, buying drinks for the cabaret girls, or listening, with half an ear, to the Countess' pointed remarks. Of course, he never noticed Cora at all. But he never noticed anybody, really. He always appeared to be having the time of his life, with one eye on the door. Waiters

danced about him, and even Albert, the head waiter, leaned over the back of his chair and made little comments from behind a scarcely moving lip, and Larry would laugh—laugh uproariously with a fine display of teeth, and unsmiling eyes, and then stop in the middle of a laugh to investigate someone coming in at the door. There was a restlessness about him, as though he were perpetually expecting somebody. Cora hardly ever took her eyes off his table. That was how she happened, one day, to see the Countess go into the dressing-room. She followed.

The Countess, after washing her hands, turned to accept a towel from the bored maid with whom she exchanged sophisticated pleasantries, totally forgetful of her two rings on the washstand. Outwardly calm, inwardly trembling with excitement, Cora busied herself at the basin, obscuring it from view. The Countess, with a last pat remark to the maid over her left shoulder, and a last long look at herself in the pier glass, sailed out. Cora, deftly sweeping the rings into her bag while the powder guardian replaced her treasures in the drawer, followed the satin heels up the stairs and across the dining-room. As she approached the table from which Larry had risen to seat the Countess, she had a moment of hesitation. Not the value of the rings, but stage fright, almost deflected her from her purpose. Then she remembered that Aperman made suits for Mary Wickham, and she went ahead.

That night, she took that little thought about wanting a thing badly enough out of the laboratory at the back of her brain, and into the front room. After all,

it had been so simple. She had met Lawrence Barker, millionaire—she, assistant housekeeper at the Lexonia—and he had asked her to sit at his table. True, stage fright had overcome her, and she had declined. But he had asked her.

Two weeks later, she went boldly into Victor's and took a table. She had seen other girls do it. The Countess and Larry were already there. To the waiter she said she was waiting. She was waiting for the Countess, who sat facing her not far away, to look over. At last, after a nervous, dry-throated interval, the Countess did look over. But that was all. Her glance, roving about the room, rested on Cora a second and passed. Cora experienced a sinking within her. The next time the Countess' eye roved, however, Cora was ready, and arrested it with an eager nod and a smile. A moment, the Countess looked puzzled. Then, with a shrug, she nodded meaninglessly and looked farther.

At that moment a bored young man with thin legs and thick hair, asked Cora to dance. She refused curtly. Tears of envy, rage and disappointment had gathered in her eyes. Just then, Larry Barker looked over and saw her. If there was one thing that could arrest Larry Barker's wandering attention, it was a tear.

He leaned back toward the Countess.

"Who's that baby—sitting alone?" He jerked his smooth, taffy-colored head in the direction of Cora.

"Baby?" the Countess laughed. "Baby elephant, I

guess. I can't place her." Then she laughed again. "I thought you liked lines—not curves."

"Sure I do." He patted her hand placatingly. "Only, if that couch cootie is bothering her—"

"Now, Larry, stop saving women. It's a habit with you. And they don't want to be saved. Anyway, that one looks as if she could save herself from anything except curvature of the silhouette."

The tears that had gathered in Cora's eyes brimmed over. Larry, turning uneasily again, saw them. He got up and went over to her. There was a free-masonry about the regular crowd at Victor's. Besides, one did not need an introduction to a girl who was crying. It was the one time Larry felt perfectly at his ease with any girl. He always could make them stop. He had a way with him.

He was somewhat startled when she brightened visibly at the sight of him and actually smiled.

"Want to dance?" he asked, a little self-consciously.

Cora had too much sense. She wanted to stand out from the other girls he knew, but not just in that way. It almost seemed as though he were going to slip away again. She clouded up ominously.

"Oh, don't! I say—what's the matter?" And, as the storm seemed to grow more imminent with each expression of concern, he pulled the extra chair around to the side of the table and took her hand in both his.

"Tell Larry what's the matter," he began, and his voice soothed her and petted her and buoyed her up, all at once. It was his way.

"I—I'm lonely," she blurted out. It was not what

she had meant to say. Something about him had drawn it out of her.

"Poor little kid," said Larry. "Poor—little—kid!" And he ordered drinks.

He did not stay with her long; just long enough to make the sun shine. There were too many other demands on his time. Besides, girls never interested him for long—except slim ones, with ash-blond hair and smooth, creamy skin.

Later, when he was dancing, she slipped out. At home, she examined once more her motto. For it had suddenly become that; hanging over the mantel in the parlor of her brain, practically the only decoration there. If you want a thing—badly enough . . .

He had told her to call him Larry. And he had told her to send Albert to let him know any time she came to Victor's. Not so bad, even though it was his habit to issue invitations to the world and his wife to make merry at his expense. And they usually did. There wasn't a girl in the show at Victor's who didn't know she could sit at a table all afternoon drinking (and if she weren't fat-fearful, eating), and if she called, "Hello, Larry!" when he came in, he would settle the check. There was hardly one who had not at some time made use of the knowledge. And some depended on it.

During the next two weeks, Cora, though still not planning any actual campaign, began to think out some general lines of action, to stand out from the other girls, and in some way to break through his indifference.

At the end of a month, she had cause to congratulate herself. He had told her she was different from the other girls he knew. She neither flirted, drank, nor accepted presents. She had not told him about the Lexonia. He believed that she had plenty of money. It was not his nature to inquire too closely. And, besides, he was not sufficiently interested. It was enough for him that she was lonely, that she did not have the faculty of making real friends in New York—a thing that he understood only too well.

And about that time, she found the Achilles' heel in his invulnerable disinterest. They were out motoring one Sunday. Cora was fond of motoring. It took Larry away from all those other people who were forever breaking in on them and dragging him away from her. It was quite a simple thing, after all, his weak spot. Larry Barker, ten-times millionaire, was home hungry.

After that, things moved more swiftly. He took her out every Sunday in the car, and as the spring wore on, he began really to enjoy those rides into the country. They were a relief from the fever heat of the week. They were restful and soothing. Cora loved them, too, but she hated the car, bright blue, silent, swift. When she figured what she could have done with the upkeep alone—!

Toward the end of May, she began to feel a vague discontent with her motto. In spite of all her wanting, the thing was not making any headway. There was something lacking. The personal note seemed so hard

to strike. There was nothing of me-and-thee-ness between them.

Then one day when they were out, Cora felt a disturbance in the man beside her. She looked up suspiciously. Passing them was a field-gray car, in which sat a slim, well-gowned woman with smooth, creamy skin. The woman never looked at them. And suddenly Larry leaned over Cora, and somewhat fiercely covered with his the two hands which lay in her lap.

"You don't hate Larry, do you?" When she had answered him, he sank back into his corner in a brooding silence. Cora, in her pleasurable excitement, almost forgot about the field-gray car—until later she felt again that inexplicable disturbance in him and looked up in time to see it coming toward them once more.

"Who is that woman?" she asked.

He reddened.

"Mrs. Van Brot; my neighbor out at the Gardens."

Cora thought then that she understood.

"Not very neighborly, is she?"

Larry's features were drawn up with something like pain.

"No. Larry doesn't register very high there."

"Poor Larry!"

This time, she put out her hand. To her surprise, he raised it to his lips.

"I don't see why you gave up your home at Clyde Gardens," she ventured finally.

He shook his head.

"It wasn't a home. There wasn't any woman to make it one."

Silence.

"A woman would be awfully lucky to be able to make a home for you. Most men don't even know what a home should be. Some day, some woman will come along and—gosh, but she'll be lucky!"

"Shucks! There are lots don't think so. Larry with a home! Ha, ha!" He laughed mirthlessly.

She stole a hand into his.

"Funny place, the world," she mused, aloud. "One person doesn't want what another would give his life for!" Another little silence. Then: "If I had a home like yours at Clyde—" Her voice was full of yearning.

"What would you do?"

She looked at him, her eyes luminous with a great eagerness.

"I'd—I'd—" Almost she was at a loss. "I'd just be happy in it," she said. Then, as he did not answer, she added again, with a sigh: "So happy!"

Larry looked down at her. And the temptation of making somebody so happy proved too much for him.

"Sister," he said, his eyes more than ever like a solemn child's, "I'm not much on love, but if you would be willing to take The Lodge with me thrown in—"

She persuaded him to keep their engagement a secret. She knew how slight was her hold on him, and she was always inclined to be prudent. She gave up her job and took a small apartment. Figuring six months at the outside for her engagement, she regu-

lated her expenses (with some pangs and misgivings, it is true) so that her money would last over that time. From Larry she accepted neither money nor presents. She would stick to her rôle. Later, she would have all the pearls she desired and fur coats and real lace—perhaps. Now and then, as he was very careless, she swelled her account a little. But she never let him give her anything. It was a happy time for her, on the whole, though it did seem to be prolonging itself unnecessarily. But Cora had patience.

At the end of the fifth month, however, her patience began to grow thin. Her money was getting perilously low, in spite of the way she took advantage, more and more, of his carelessness. And he showed no ardent desire for the bridegroom's rôle. The personal note was still lacking in their relations. He kissed her when they were alone, and petted her when she cried. But it began to irk her to be called "Sister."

And Mrs. Van Brot was on her nerves. Somehow, that woman made her feel that there were things she would never have, even with Larry's millions. And she always seemed to sense, when Mrs. Van Brot crossed the horizon, that Larry in some way slipped past her. She grew jealous of that woman with her unapproachable serenity and the air with which she carried herself.

Cora began to inquire about her, but nobody seemed to know anything bad. She had apparently been very happy with John Van Brot, in spite of the thirty years' disparity in their ages. She was very well liked, and entertained a great deal. Cora had determined that,

expense or no expense, Mrs. Barker's entertainments should throw Mrs. Van Brot's into the dark shade. She grew to have a devouring hate for the woman, and, to fan her hate, bought all the papers and the society publications that had accounts of her. At last, when all her searching and inquiries unearthed nothing, she sent for Jimmie Bowker.

He had never even heard of Mrs. Van Brot. But he promised to try to find out something about her.

"What's she like?" he inquired naturally.

Cora fished around among the Sunday supplements and handed him a sheet. She distinctly thought she saw him start. He examined the picture carefully, intently. Then he put his hand over the hair and, cocking his slightly bald, blond head on one side and closing one eye, continued the examination. And then, suddenly, he thrust it back at her, and it seemed to her he looked a little shaky.

"Do you know her?" asked Cora.

"No," he answered.

She shook off the feeling that he was lying. Why should he lie?

"But you'll see what you can find out about her?"

"What do you want to know?"

"Everything. I want to know who she is and where she comes from. Nobody seems even to know what her name was. And I have to find out. I hate her!"

Again it seemed to Cora as though Jimmie looked peculiar. And, after he had gone, promising to do what he could, she pondered over the baffling look there had been in his eyes. What was it? She picked up the

paper again, and, looking at it quickly, she seemed to catch something—then it eluded her again. She covered the hair with her hand as Jimmie had done, and—

Cora could not sleep all that night. And the next evening she could hardly wait for Larry's greeting to ask him casually—oh, very casually:

"What's Mrs. Van Brot's first name?"

"Lydia," he replied, and blushed.

But Cora failed to see the blush. She was too triumphant. She had been right. It was Lydia Holden, the girl whose face she had seen once from the drawer in Mrs. Holden's bureau; the girl who had run off with the traveling man who was already married; the girl for whom Jimmie Bowker had cared. Actually, if one wanted a thing—badly enough . . .

It was the fourth of November and a day that Cora Bleyden never in her life forgot. Years later, when she had long since ceased to be Cora Bleyden, she could not think back on that day without emotion. For in that morning's *Town Talk* there appeared an article which meant the end of Mrs. Van Brot, socially, forever. And, by a coincidence, that very morning Larry had set a day for their wedding. It was well. Her money was gone, and all that stood between her and calamity was the hundred dollars that Nella Rose had scraped together on receipt of Cora's urgent letter. And she was on her way to The Lodge to give orders for redecorating to suit herself.

Indeed, as she sat back, the very air that whistled past the silent blue car seemed to be saying: "If you want a thing badly enough—" A thing? Any num-

ber of things. Anything in life to be had for the wanting, if people only knew!

She passed to Larry her copy of *Town Talk*, open at the first page.

"There!" She was almost sick with surfeit of pleasurable sensation. "I guess there's one person won't be giving any more swell parties at Clyde Park and leaving you out!"

She was too engrossed in the whirlpool of her own emotions to note how he paled and how he trembled as he read. After he had finished reading, he sank into an apathy, so far beyond her reach that she could not seem to connect with him any more, at any point. She was impatient of any flaw in her triumphant happiness that day. She wanted everything to continue to rush forward. She put her hand into his. He pressed it mechanically. He was a million miles away. She felt like exploding a bomb to bring him back to earth—to her. Her eye lit on the copy of *Town Talk*, open on his knee.

"I did that," she said, impelled in spite of her prudence, by the need of a high and constant pitch of excitement.

"You—what?"

She mistook it for incredulity that she could have achieved it.

"I did it. I found out who she was—myself—and I let them have it. The dirty snob!"

"You!" He was screaming. "You—!" His face was gray-white, and his eyes were black and starting from his head. "You—!" He could not find a word

for her, and, in his rage, he seized her by the shoulders—seized her and shook and shook and shook her, like a frightened rat. She did not cry out. The breath had left her body too suddenly. But her hat hung crazily by one pin, and a long strand of hair unloosened itself and dropped down across her face. Then he flung her back into the corner against the blue upholstery.

The car had stopped at The Lodge, and Reeves was at the door. Lawrence Barker flung himself out and disappeared up the path toward Ten Oaks, the Van Brot place. He was heading straight for the house, not knowing what he meant to do there, when a glint of yellow sweater deflected him to the pergola. She was in there alone—Mrs. Van Brot—her head buried on her arms on the little rustic table. She did not even look up when his feet crunched along the brown, dried leaves. She was crying. Mrs. Van Brot, the serene, the unapproachable, was crying, with her head on her arms, like a little girl.

If there was one thing on earth that Larry Barker could not stand, it was tears. And he did seem to know how to dry them. He had a way with him. And who was Lydia Holden to hold out against his way? A frightened, heart-sick, miserable girl of seven-and-twenty, who had lived so much, and braved so much, and suffered so much, that she might have a house of peace and esteem, only to find it suddenly tumbled about her ears. And he was the first who had come to her—he might be the only one; and his voice soothed and caressed and comforted her, and his eyes were full of

sympathy and something that men have said with their eyes since time before time, and women have read and understood.

"Dear Lady," he began in that inimitable way of his. . . .

For a whole week, Cora could not believe that what had happened to her had happened. Even when she could not find Larry at Victor's or the Tarleton, and there was no answer from The Lodge. Later, his lawyer, a terribly shrewd, painstaking, bone-spectacled young man, whose clients' interests were his religion and his gospel, came to see her and explained to her the inadvisability of any suit for breach of promise, because of the irregular state of the cash register at the Holden House coincident with her sudden departure (oh, he was a very shrewd young lawyer, and very painstaking). Only then did she realize the full extent of the calamity which had befallen her and the utter hopelessness of it all.

Pudd Mittelfinger met her train at Albany, as she had wired him to do. They were to be married at once. Since the death of his mother, the farm and the dairy had not been paying very well, and he was gloomy and humble.

At lunch, he reached across the table and took her hand in his—a hand rough, somewhat damp, and a little sticky.

"I can't believe my luck, Cora. After all the hard luck I been having, to get you in the end! You know, sometimes I think if you want a thing—bad enough . . ."

FIVE: A MESS OF POTTAGE

AT the corner of Westchester Avenue and a side street, somewhere in the Bronx, a young woman, wheeling a baby-carriage, stopped and waited for an automobile to pass. She was a slight, young thing with large, earnest, brown eyes and a lot of fine, dark hair brushed up carelessly under a cheap hat. Her blue suit had, in its prime, been well made and of good stuff. That was why it had outworn the look of bridal radiancy which had accompanied it in those days.

It hung limply about her sagging shoulders as she waited, heavy eyed, for the machine to pass. But it did not pass. It stopped directly in front of her, a huge, purple, conspicuously expensive-looking car, and a man stepped out. He was a stout man, nearing middle age, with a little black moustache and small, expressive, black eyes. He looked like the kind of man who approves of himself quite thoroughly, and treats himself accordingly.

"Nedda!" he exclaimed, and held out a small plump hand with an enormous ruby on the little finger.

She gave a startled look at her shabby shoes and skirt, then threw back her head and met his eyes coolly.

"Hello, Will," she said, cordially enough, but without enthusiasm, and let him grasp her reddened, ungloved hand.

He did not let it go, but stood holding it, regarding her. At last he spoke.

"You live up this way?"

"Yes," she answered, and took her hand away.

Again he seemed, looking at her, to forget to speak. She did not try to help him.

"I just happened to be passing here—I was trying to locate a man up this way," he mumbled finally; then he added bluntly, "What's the matter with you, Nedda? You don't look like yourself at all."

She gazed at the handle of the carriage which she was pushing back and forth. "There's nothing the matter with me," she said indifferently.

Again it was with an effort he seemed to find words to speak to her.

"I'm awfully glad to see you, Nedda. I have thought sometimes I would never see you again. This is the first time since you were married—it must be three years."

"Two," she corrected, without animation. She glanced around as though she were contemplating going further, and he asked her:

"Where were you going? Anywhere special?"

"No—just keeping the baby out."

He looked helplessly at the baby carriage, and then suddenly his eyes brightened.

"Wouldn't you like to take the baby for a ride?"

"No, thanks," she replied, and looked about her quickly.

He tried desperately to keep her there. "Do you

like my car? It cost me twelve thousand dollars," he said.

For the first time the wearied look lifted from her eyes, and something like mirth shone in their shadowy depths. "Still the same old Will, aren't you?"

"Yes—Nedda—still the same!" he answered with sudden fervor—meaningly.

Instantly she withdrew behind her former manner. "I did not mean that," she said. "I must be going."

"Nedda—!" he began impetuously; but at the look in her eyes he dropped his hand. "Do you always walk along Westchester?" he added in a conversational tone.

"Yes—that is—sometimes I do. Good-bye. Glad to have seen you again. And without a backward turn of her head, she walked off.

He watched her dragging her little, ill-shod feet until she was out of sight, a hungry look in his eyes, his full curved lips almost tremulous. Then, slowly, without any spring to his step, he got into the splendid car and drove away.

At five o'clock in the morning the baby cried. It always did. Three or four times during the night and early in the morning. Nedda put out a tired hand to soothe it, but it would not be soothed. Half dazed with lack of sleep she dragged herself out of bed and tried to quiet it. At last she took it into her own bed and it finally fell asleep. She likewise.

At half past six the alarm-clock tore her out of her sleep and half out of bed. It always shocked her that

way, but Douglas merely stirred sleepily and drew the sheet closer about his broad shoulders. He did not have to get up until seven, but he set the clock to ring a half hour earlier so that he could doze a while. But Nedda could not doze; the baby was wide awake.

So she got up and dressed half-heartedly. Her eyelids were leaden and her head throbbed. When breakfast had been started she woke Douglas. It took a good deal of nervous energy and will-power to get him up. But at last his curly tousled head disappeared in the bathroom.

Breakfast was just ready when he emerged. He was good to look at, clean-cut, freshly shaved, his blue eyes clear and bright, his teeth white and shiny, the curly hair all smoothed back close to his head. He came up and kissed her on the back of the neck as she bent over the stove.

"Morning, Sister," he said cheerily, then went over to the baby. "Morning, Sister Junior. How'd you sleep last night? Hardly heard you at all. Gad! It's a great day for work," he continued, looking out of the window at the hard clear blue of the October sky. Then he turned back to Nedda.

"Doesn't a day like this make you feel like going out and killing a couple of Turks?" And when she only answered with a little shrug, he added, "I wish you'd buck up, Sis, and get a little pep into you. What's the matter? Are you sick? Because if you are, you'd better go back to bed."

She answered him with an attempt at pep. "No. I'm not sick. I'm feeling fine."

"Then why in Heaven's name," he puckered up his straight, smooth brow on which the curly hair grew low down in a straight line, "do you go around looking like the Children of Israel being driven from the Promised Land?"

A hurt look came into her eyes as she answered quietly, "I guess I'm just—tired."

"Tired?" he exploded; "why, you just got up! How can you be tired?"

She did not attempt to answer, but began serving his breakfast.

He picked up the *Times*, and propping it against the sugar-bowl, commenced to read. She swallowed a cup of coffee hastily and began clearing the things from the table. He looked up.

"Have a heart," he expostulated; "let's eat like civilized people instead of quick-lunch savages."

She gave him a queer look as he buried himself once more in his civilized paper, but did not say anything. She sat in her chair waiting for him to finish, figuring mentally what she would do first.

At last he was ready to go.

"Good-bye," he said, and kissed her on the cheek with a final admonition not to work too hard. "You know," he added, "a fellow hates to come home and find his lil ole wife all tuckered out. Don't overdo things. Take it easy."

She dragged through the tasks of washing the dishes and cleaning up the flat. Baby's bottles had to be sterilized and the formula prepared. There were some of the baby's things to be washed and taken up on

the roof, and the bathroom had to be scrubbed. And, too, she made a cake for Douglas. He was boyishly fond of desserts, and his eyes would light up happily over anything sweet that pleased him. She bathed the baby, but would not yield to the luxury of fondling its little bare body. The doctor had told her it should be outdoors by eleven, and that meant no time wasted.

Except the hour that the baby slept at noon, she had to keep wheeling it constantly. She used to marvel at mothers who could sit on little camp stools and sew while their children played contentedly in their carriages. Hers never did, and she had to do her sewing in rainy weather or evenings.

"I know I ought to train her better," Nedda agreed to her mother, "and I suppose it wouldn't hurt her to cry it out once or twice. But she cries so much! And I get all unstrung when I hear her. Sometime, when she's through teething, I'll try."

At a quarter to two she hesitated at Westchester Avenue, deciding whether to go down or cross over. Suddenly, with a defiant toss of her head, she turned down.

At two the big purple automobile overtook her, and its occupant alighted.

"It was good of you to walk here," he said.

"I always walk here," she answered him sharply; "I didn't think you would be looking for another man in the Bronx."

"I'm not. I came up to look for you. What's the use of pretending? You knew I would follow you up.

You always knew what I was going to do before I did it."

She contemplated the handle of the baby carriage in silence.

"I'm going to take you out for a ride," he told her, with assurance.

"No," she said, "I can't go." But she spoke without conviction.

"Can't!" he repeated, "that's better than won't. Now, why can't you?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I don't care to, in the first place, and in the second, I have the baby-carriage."

The man snapped his fingers. "Robbins," he called.

The chauffeur came toward them. "Take this carriage to Mrs. Warren's house and leave it in the hall. What's the number?" he continued, already bending over the baby as though to lift it out.

Nedda had started to remonstrate, but now she came around to the side of the carriage and hurriedly lifted the baby out herself.

"1115 Forest Avenue," she said, and permitted herself to be helped into the car.

She sank deep down into the upholstery, and all the tired muscles of her back and limbs relaxed as they had not done in months. It is hard to relax, even at night, when one has to be always half alert—waiting for the baby's next cry. But the motion of the machine pleased the baby, and Nedda closed her eyes in exquisite content.

For a long time the man did not speak a word to

her, and she dozed in her corner. At last, with a start, she opened her eyes and found his fixed on her, full of tenderness.

"Do you feel rested?" he asked her gently.

She smiled gratefully.

"You look better already. You must have been very tired. Does the baby keep you awake nights?"

It was the first time anyone had ever thought of asking her that, and her eyes misted suddenly as she nodded.

"Poor little kid. . . . And don't you get any rest in the day?"

She hated herself for it, but two big tears rolled slowly down her face.

"Couldn't the girl take the baby out?"

"I haven't any girl."

"And you have to do all your own work?"

"Why,—yes."

"What kind of a fellow is your husband, anyway?"

Instantly she flared up at him. "You—cut that—Will! Don't you dare start discussing Douglas. I knew when I married him that we wouldn't have money enough to—"

"That doesn't matter—what you knew! He had no business to marry a girl like you if he couldn't take care of you properly."

"What do you mean? He takes care of me properly—"

"Sure—letting you do all your own work and mind a baby that keeps you up all night! And I bet you never have a cent to spend on yourself!"

"I have, too! Don't talk that way! You just cheapen yourself. You always were nasty about Douglas because—because—"

"Yes—say it. Because he married you, and I wanted you. Because he couldn't take care of you right and I could."

She started to say something cutting, but he interrupted her bitterly.

"I'm not saying anything about you. But he had no right to do it. He was only a kid. He should have waited and not asked you to give your life to him, until he was fixed."

"Fixed!" she flung at him—"that's all you know about. That's not what marriage means. But you couldn't ever understand."

"No!" His face was white and he talked in a half strangled way. "No—of course not! But he understands! When you're sick or tired from doing his work—does he understand then? Tell me—does he understand?"

She shrank back into her corner with frightened eyes.

"I knew when I looked at him he couldn't think of anything that wasn't told him. Maybe he means well—but he has to be told—everything. And you wouldn't ever tell him. You're that kind of a fool!"

She sat in miserable silence.

"The only way to get anything out of a fellow like him," he continued relentlessly, "is to cry for it. And you wouldn't even ask! People have to fight to be allowed to give you things. I know—you're just like

my mother—God bless her! I would know how to give you things. My God!" he bent toward her eagerly, "if I only could. If you would only let me—!"

She sat up stiffly. "Thank you," she said, "but I really am not in need of anything. In fact, I am quite sure that I will never need to have you—give me—anything! I would like to go back now, please."

He gave the order to the chauffeur and sat in silence as tight-lipped as her own until they were nearly home. Then he said:

"I don't know why you always think I have the worst motives."

She relented a little. "I don't, Will," she explained gently, "I don't. I know you just want to be—kind to me, but I don't like people to be kind to me—in that way."

"In what way? You didn't even know what I was talking about. Do you think I want to give you diamonds—or dresses? You're so set! All I meant was—here I have a car. I don't use it myself in the day. And you go and walk the streets with the baby until you're half dead every afternoon. But would you use my car? No! Because you're so damn proud you wouldn't want me to know there was anything your husband didn't give you. But I know it already. Or maybe you think I couldn't give you anything without asking a price—"

She raised her hand. "No, no, Will. It isn't that!"

"Then what is it?"

It was a full moment before she spoke. "Douglas mightn't like it," she said, lamely.

The man made a gesture of supreme impatience. "Like it! Does he only do things you like? And you mean to say he wouldn't like you to get off your feet for a minute instead of going on till you drop? Doesn't he even give you the right to be tired?"

She looked off into space with tear-filled, wide-open eyes, and his voice softened. "Listen, Nedda; let's put our cards on the table the way we used to. Maybe, sometimes, I don't understand, but you know you can't fool me. And you know I'm your friend—don't you?"

"Surely," she said.

"Well, then. I won't pretend I'm not as crazy about you as I ever was. And I won't pretend that I wouldn't move heaven and earth to get you away from him. But if I can't have you, at least I want to be something to you;—if nothing else, the one to make things a little easier for you. Surely there's nothing wrong in that?"

He took her silence for assent.

"I'm going to send the car for you and the baby every afternoon, and you'll have a little rest, and it'll be fine for the baby. You can take her up in the country. There isn't even a park around here. And I won't come along. There can't be anything wrong with that—can there? If I never come along, unless you let me?"

"No—there's nothing wrong—and it's awfully sweet of you, Will. I don't know why you're so good to me—"

"Then it's all settled?"

She thought a moment, then: "No," she replied doggedly; "I don't want to accept anything from you."

"Suit yourself," he said stiffly. But as he held the housedoor open for her he made one more attempt.

"In case you change your mind, I'll have the man drive up and down Westchester Avenue between two and three."

Douglas, coming in early that evening, responded immediately to the change in her. She was smiling and her eyes were bright, and he bustled around happily, helping her finish up.

"After all, it's my fault," she told herself. "If I didn't get so cross he'd always be glad to help me instead of going inside and playing the piano. He's really an awfully good kid!" And somewhere inside her remorse for something or other, stirred faintly.

Douglas jumped up from the supper table a dozen times to get things, and he clapped his hands like a boy when she brought in the platters.

"Oh, ba-by! Potato pancakes! Come to papa!"

Once he bent her head back and kissed her on the mouth as he passed in back of her chair.

"You know, Sis, I feel good enough to go out and capture a couple of countries and bring them home in my pocket for you."

"Bless his heart!" thought Nedda. "He just doesn't know what to do with me when I'm fagged. If I could only manage to feel well all the time!"

Between the hours of two and three the next after-

noon Nedda was considerably west of Westchester Avenue. So far west, that it was nearly five when she reached home again, dragging her feet wearily. She almost dropped the baby and all the covers on the third flight upstairs. The sight of the baby's clothes waiting to be ironed filled her with a numb despair. She had barely started on them when Douglas phoned that he was bringing company home to dinner. Company! She could have cried at the phone.

"I'll have to leave the ironing," she figured, "and get some rest. Otherwise I won't be presentable."

So she laid the baby on the inside of the bed with her own body as a barricade. But the baby resented being put on the bed and commenced to cry. Nedda must have been very tired for she fell asleep in spite of its whimpering. She must have slept soundly, too, for the next thing she knew the baby was lying on the floor, screaming. It had crawled in some strange, new way, over her body and fallen to the floor. It was not hurt, but badly shocked.

At seven Douglas came in with his guest. He found the baby crying and Nedda a wreck. And supper was not even ready. When it was finally served, Nedda insisted on keeping the baby on her arm. And the kitchen looked so horribly untidy that he felt ashamed before his friend.

"Why don't you put the youngster down?" he asked, at last, irritably.

"She'll cry."

"Well, put her in the bedroom and close the door and we won't hear her," he said.

So she took her into the bedroom, but stayed there with her, and left him to entertain his friend alone. When he came in to see what was the trouble, he found her walking up and down with the baby.

He gave one cold glance into the room. Then, "I'd better take Wallace to the movies," he said, and went off.

Later when he came back the dishes were washed and Nedda was sleeping with her head on the kitchen table. He roused her and told her he was going to bed.

"Why don't you leave that till to-morrow," he suggested kindly enough when he saw that she was beginning to put the dishes away.

"To-morrow!" she said wearily.

At last, just as she tumbled into bed he reminded her that the clock had not been wound.

"Wind it yourself," she told him, and dropped on her face on the pillow.

The baby cried half through the night and Douglas, out of sorts and aggrieved, asked her in the morning—"What the devil was the matter with the kid?"

And when she told him about the fall he was furious.

"If a nurse-girl did a thing like that you'd fire her. How could you be so careless?"

As usual she did not answer him, but something hard, like a bitter resolve, tightened her lips and narrowed her eyes.

She was on Westchester Avenue at a quarter of two. At two she stepped silently into the car and waited while the man took the carriage back to her house.

"Mr. Lewis is in this neighborhood," he told her, "and he said to call for him at the subway-station if it was agreeable to you, and drive him down. But if it wasn't agreeable he would take the subway."

So that was it. She had known he would manage somehow to keep only the letter of his promise. But it didn't matter.

He was so radiantly happy when he caught sight of her that her heart warmed in spite of her. And he had the tact not to say anything, but stepped in quite matter-of-factly.

The October wind blew in their faces. "You ought to have a little hat," he said.

"This is all right," she told him, but he stopped the car and walked back to a millinery shop. Presently he came out again with a box, which he laid on the floor of the car. He did not offer it to her, so she had no opportunity of refusing it. There was a little Autumn chill in the air, and Nedda shivered slightly. He wrapped the covers about her and the baby, and she felt deliciously cared for, shutting her eyes before the wind.

The man spoke very little. He seemed more than content just to have her there. And there was something comfortably impersonal in his attitude.

"Sometimes he is quite human," she thought. "He'll make a good husband for some girl."

He helped her into the house, and when he saw that she had to walk up, he took the baby from her arms and carried it.

Hearing him puff, "I bet it's the first time in his

life he's walked up three flights of stairs," thought Nedda. The chauffeur followed with the carriage covers and the hat-box.

"Won't you come in?" she asked, but with misgiving. But he would not and left at once. She unpacked the hat. It was a little velvet affair—a sort of tam—and it was very becoming.

She tried it on, and did not battle with herself. "I might as well. He's an old dear, and he knows me too well to imagine things. It's partly because I haven't the heart to offend him." But it was not. It was because the hat was both becoming and chic, and her other one was not. And with that almost feminine instinct of his he had made it so very easy for her to accept it.

The next day there was a warm coat in the car for her—a dark, good-looking wrap. Having taken the hat, she could not quibble over the coat.

Every clear day after that she drove out in the car with the baby. At the end of two months she looked better—felt better. Then, one day, he said to her suddenly:

"Oh, Nedda! If you would only care for me! We could be so happy together!"

Riding in his car, she only said, "You mustn't talk about those things, Will."

But when she got home she told him, "I am not going out with you any more, Will. I couldn't after to-day."

He seemed terribly disappointed, and begged her, "If you ever change your mind, call up and leave word

at my house, or the garage, and Robbins will come up for you."

It was with regret that she saw him go. She knew³ that he meant well—he just could not understand. On the whole though, she was glad that it was over, on account of Douglas. She had never felt just right about it, especially when, as lately, he had been so good to her. And she felt so rested she was sure she could manage her work now.

She did. For a week. Then she began to grow very tired—even more tired than formerly. Afternoons, as she paced the streets, dropping with fatigue and numb with cold, she thought wistfully of the ease of the car. Presently she was back in that state of tiredness where every inch of her cried out for rest. There seemed to be no end to the agony the baby must endure with its teething. Nedda would hardly be asleep when the baby would cry and she would cry along with it for weariness.

She would get up and walk with it hours long in the front room. There was no need for Douglas to lose his sleep too. He would only be cross and unfit for work in the morning. And then when she sank into what seemed like the first real sleep she had tasted, the clock would go off and the day would begin. Over and over the same weary round of tasks, never done quite thoroughly—never finished and put out of the way.

She tried to make the cooking as light as possible, so Douglas would not find her too fagged when he came home. But he did not like simple things to eat.

And when she made what he did like, often he did not touch it, because her eyes were red from weeping, and he felt upset about it. He knew he had not done anything to her. It was not his fault that he did not have more money so she could take things easier. He worked as hard as he could and he was doing the best he could do.

One night he had it out with her—that is, he didn't tell her all that was on his mind, but he felt that she needed a little reasoning with. So he said, "If you think I got married just to have someone cook my meals, you're mistaken. I could have got a servant girl to do that!" He meant to add, gently, that a wife ought to be more of a companion to a man. He meant the whole thing in a nice way, but she had flared up at him furiously.

"Oh! How I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!"

The next morning at breakfast her mother phoned. She lived in a pretty place in Long Island.

"Nedda, darling, I wish you'd come out and see me. I've got the blues so bad, I've just got to see someone."

"Why, mother, I don't see how I can. Why don't you come in?"

"I can't, honey. Really I can't. The trip just wears me out. Bring the baby along and stay over with me. The rest will do you good. I'm all unstrung. You know, since Annie left, I haven't been able to get any kind of a cook. And now Jennie's threatening to leave if she has to keep on doing all the work, and I'm half dead trying to manage. You never come near me,"

she added reproachfully, "and I hardly know I have a grandchild!"

"Oh, Mother! But you know how it upsets baby to be taken away from home—"

"Really, Nedda, other babies are taken to see their grandparents occasionally. You'll make a regular tyrant out of that child. You could come and stay over. The air out here would do her good."

"But if I stay over, Douglas won't have—"

Douglas interrupted. "Don't worry about me. I'll go to Spencer's. It'll be a change for me, too."

And her mother was saying at the other end—"Don't make such a slave of yourself for him. The more you do for him the more he expects and—"

"All right," cut in Nedda wearily, "I'll come. But not to-day. To-morrow. I have to get an early start."

That meant extra work that day. She thought she would never get through with it. And her head ached maddeningly. At twelve, just as she was finally getting the baby ready for the street the phone rang. It was Will Lewis.

"Hello, Nedda? I am coming up for you. Will it be all right?"

"Yes," she answered quickly, "Ah! yes."

"I felt as if you needed me, to-day," he told her after they were seated in the car.

"I did," she said and he took her cold, limp hand under the robe and held it in his.

"I just felt it . . . And I want to help you. I won't let go of myself again. I know it's no use, and it just

makes it harder for you. You can't make yourself care for me."

She looked at him with large soft eyes. "No, Will. You know I used to try. I'm awfully fond of you, but I just never could care—that way."

"And your husband—you care for him—that way?"

She pressed her lips tight together. Then she said, "I wonder if you'd understand, Will. I do care for Douglas. There never was anybody else. And I know he loves me. And we could be very happy—if—if"—She interrupted herself thoughtfully . . . "You know—sometimes—you dream that an Ogre is closing in on you, and you keep saying to yourself, 'But it's only a dream—only a dream . . .' yet you keep on running and being frightened?"

He humored her by smiling.

"Well that's the way it is with me. I know, at bottom things are all right between us, and by and by they'll straighten out. But just now the Ogre has me panting. If only I didn't get—so—tired!"

He patted her hand gently under the cover.

"I get so tired, I can't think. And then I'm cross and that reacts on Douglas and he gets cross—and things keep getting worse and worse until I'm afraid, sometimes, where they will end. Will—last night—and this morning—I hated him!"

He held his breath while she went on and told him about the night before, and her mother's message in the morning.

"And I don't get any rest when I go out there," she concluded. "It wears me out getting ready and carry-

ing the baby and her bottles and things and catching a train. And it makes baby cross. And Mother is forever worrying over me and reminding me that she told me not to marry Douglas . . . it wears me all to pieces."

He stroked her hand and there was a long silence between them. At last he said, "If you could get a good night's sleep you would be yourself again."

She did not answer.

"Nedda, I'd love to help you. But you keep tying my hands because you feel in your heart of hearts that I'm a devil with horns."

"No, Will, I don't. You're awfully good to me."

"Well, I have an idea. But promise me you won't think—promise me you'll believe I really want to help you."

"Of course I believe it, Will. But I'd rather just help myself—"

"The way you have all along! I tell you, it's too much for you—all the work and the worry—"

"Other women do it."

"It's different, Nedda. You aren't strong enough. You weren't trained to hard work. And you've got generations of ancestors behind you who had nothing much to do but take care of themselves. You haven't the endurance."

"But what am I to do?" she demanded bitterly; "I chose this life, and I'm willing to live up to my end, I'm content to do what I have to do."

"But what if you can't? If you break down?"

She looked at him with wide eyes. "But I won't!"

"No," he said, "of course not!"

She sat in miserable silence. Then she cried, "But what can I do?"

"You remember—I told you about Mrs. Wardell—my old nurse. . . . She lives with me and keeps my house. Would your husband find out if I sent her up to help you during the day?"

"Yes—his sister often drops in—and she knows we haven't money enough to afford—Oh, don't bother, Will. It'll all work out right. I know it will." Then she broke out, despairingly, "If I only didn't have to go to mother's—!"

"Listen, Nedda. Douglas expects you to stay overnight at your mother's, doesn't he?"

"Yes."

"Well—would your mother be surprised if you changed your mind and came home?"

"N-no," she replied with almost a premonition of what was coming.

"Well, I'll be out of town to-morrow night. If you would go to my house, nobody would be the wiser. Mrs. Wardell would take the baby from you when you stepped in the door—she was a trained baby-nurse once—and Florence would help you to bed and you wouldn't have a thing to do but sleep as long as you like. You wouldn't hear the baby, but you'd know she was being taken care of properly. It isn't much to offer but maybe it would help you to—to fool the ogre," he finished with a little smile.

She did not respond, and he did not press her. But at last he asked, "What do you say?"

"It's out of the question," she answered.

"No—it's not. If I were a woman you would do it without hesitation. But because I am a man you think I have only one certain idea in my head. I won't ask you again. I have some pride, too—even though I love you enough to swallow it most of the time."

She looked at him helplessly. "Don't, Will; don't quarrel with me. I know you want to help me. But I don't want to be helped. Only don't quarrel with me—please—" she was very near to tears.

His arm went around her shoulders. "Dear, don't cry. I'm not quarreling with you. If you don't want me to help you, I'm not angry. I'll tell you what. I'll just give my orders and the place will be ready for you. Maybe if you don't have to tell me anything about it, you'll go right ahead. If you get off the subway, at Seventy-Second street, you can hop on a taxi and it will be paid for at the house. Just drive up, and Florence and Mrs. Wardell will take care of you and you needn't have another thought until you're ready to go home. Stay there a week, if you can. Mrs. Wardell will let me know at the office when you are gone. And she'll have orders to get you anything you need. You can have your meals in bed and it will do you a world of good."

Unaccountably she was crying, and he kept his arm about her shoulders and soothed her. At last she felt better. When she stepped out, she said, "You're a dear, Will. You're as thoughtful as a woman. I can't accept it—but I know how you meant to offer it. And—thanks!"

"Don't thank me, honey. I'd do anything, anything—for you."

"Yes, he would," she reflected when she was alone—"only—"

On the train the next day, her mind dwelt wearily on the horrid nightmare of the whole day . . . the endless restlessness of the baby . . . the nervous strain of handling Jennie, who refused to be placated even when Nedda cooked the lunch and helped with the dishes. And her mother's greeting:

"Heavens, Nedda, you're a perfect rail! And why don't you get yourself some decent clothes? Doesn't he ever think you need anything for yourself? . . . I told you when you married him, you were making a mistake. But children always know everything better than their parents. Don't you wish, now, you had listened to me? . . . For Heaven's sake, Nedda, doesn't that baby ever lie still? Why, when you were a child you used to lie there for hours just playing with your toes. You must have spoiled her terribly.

"Isn't it awful the troubles one has—just living? I often ask myself—is it worth it? You struggle to raise a family and then, what have you got out of it? A son in the army and a daughter in the Bronx. And then Annie has to go and get married on top of it all—and Jennie gets the bugs." And so forth. . . .

Her mother had remonstrated when Nedda, whose nerves were unstrung, said she must go—Douglas was expecting her.

"But you'll have to cook your own supper when you

get in. I think it's an outrage the way you make a slave of yourself for that man. And what'll you get out of it? A good kick. It's just like I always said—the game isn't worth it for the woman. Nothing but work and wear yourself out when you're young, and then when you're old there's nobody to care what happens to you."

The baby fidgeted all the way home in the train. And she struck the rush hour in the subway. Men and girls stumbled over her satchel and pressed in close around her and the baby. The youngster began to cry. People looked at her as though she were a public nuisance. She felt that she was, with her satchel and her screaming baby.

"Why don't she hire a hall?"

"For God's sake—muzzle it."

All along the car people were craning their necks to see her. She looked out. They were passing Eighteenth street. Another three quarters of an hour and she would be home. Three quarters of an hour more of this—and then—home—the deserted flat—and no supper for herself.

The picture of the other came to her, gently, insinuatingly. To get off, the station after next, and take a taxi to his house. . . . And someone would take the baby out of her arms and she could sink onto a soft bed, and know that she would not have to raise her weary limbs again, nor rouse her tired brain to action.

The train stopped at Grand Central and even more people got on.

To get off at the next station and step into a taxi—

“People with babies shouldn’t travel in the rush hours.”

—and have somebody take the baby from her arms—

“God! Doesn’t it ever let up?”

—and to be able to sleep—tight, sound sleep—relaxed—

“Hey! Charlie! Tell that dame her kid’s crying. Maybe she don’t know it.”

—to drop it all from her shoulders for one perfect night—

“Aw, give it Rough-on-Rats! Dey don’t die in de house.”

—to feel that somebody else—

“Seventy-Second street!” yelled the guard.

By a miracle she was able to get through the crowd and out in time.

In the luxurious semi-darkness of a big, well-ordered room, Nedda lay, and stretched her limbs deliciously, in the embracing softness of the huge four-poster bed. The weight was gone from her head, and from her heart and body. An ecstatic numbness crept up from her limbs. She said to herself exultantly, though with increasing drowsiness, over and over, “I am going to sleep—I am going to sleep. . . .” Who knows whether Esau, eating his pottage, did not consider it well worth the trifling cost of a birthright. . . .

To Nedda there was nothing but soul-deep content in the abandon of the moment that comes before longed-for sleep. Even the sound of a man’s voice

somewhere in the house, did not send a disturbing wave of reminiscence through her waning consciousness . . .

She smiled happily at the Ogre, now grinning no longer, but vanishing discomfited through a door which had opened softly, somewhere. And the smile did not fade even when the Ogre seemed suddenly grown concrete, with dark eyes and a black moustache. For she had already passed into the Promised Land of Sleep.

SIX: WE CAN'T AFFORD IT

I DON'T want to hetz you up, Bessie, but the answer is, you got to put your feet down with Irving. He's got to give you more money." Bessie Apfel looked down at her thus-mentioned pedal extremities where she had them half curled under her on her mother's lavender-satin bed quilt. The expression in her eyes, still dewy with recent tears, was not exactly hopeful. The feet in high-heeled, soft-kid pumps did not look reassuringly capable of solving her problem.

A shaft of September sunlight streaming through the half-curtained window of Mrs. Levinson's big gayly French-cretonned bedroom brought out subtle tones of red in her daughter's fluffy dark hair and lines of gray not at all subtle in her own. No, there was nothing subtle about Mrs. Levinson. What she was, she was. A very comely, small-featured, well-corseted, blue-serge-clad matron with a great energy, a great shrewdness and a great kindness inscribed in her still-sparkling black eyes where all who ran might perceive. The history of her life, complete in two volumes, she carried on her hands—five huge, unimpeachable, bluewhite diamond rings to show whither she had risen; and the red, wrinkled, work-roughened skin and knobby knuckles underneath to show whence.

Bessie was a small-scale duplicate of her mother—more subtly presented, more delicately toned. Before

her marriage she had always been considered an extraordinarily pretty girl, even in Flatbush, where pretty girls are by no means extraordinary. She had an utterly insignificant nose, the kind of mouth that is more often written of than encountered and an eternal *au secours* crying from the depths of the biggest, brownest, velvetiest eyes imaginable. Her figure might best be described as a small armful.

"It can't go on this way," continued Mrs. Levinson. She was embroidering a sixty-inch luncheon cloth for Bessie, and she jabbed the stiletto violently but skillfully into a potential eyelet. "I wouldn't say if he wasn't making it. But Counselor Goldstein says last year he made out for him the income tax on twelve thousand dollars."

"Twelve thou—"

Bessie sat up incredulously, her five-feet-three sinking deep into the soft lavender comforter.

"Honest! I didn't told you before, because what's the use to hetz you up? I thought maybe with good treatment you'll bring him round. But now I see it's a mistake. You got to put down your feet."

Bessie wriggled one small pump on and off a narrow heel, her expression more utterly *au secours* than ever.

"It's not easy, mamma. I've tried lots of times to reason with him. But you just can't argue with Irving. Either he changes the subject, or he says 'We can't afford it,' and that's all the satisfaction I get."

"If there's anything tighter than a German Jew that's tight I got to meet it yet. Forty dollars a week

to give his wife when he's making easy over two hundred! And she stands for it!"

"But, mamma, what can I do? I can't be always fighting, especially over money. I'd rather do without than keep nagging for a thing."

"Sure! Don't I know? And don't he know too? Is he such a damn fool he don't know that rather than fight you'll do without? And rather than you should do without, I'll give?"

"I feel so ashamed—sometimes—to keep taking—"

"What do you got to feel ashamed? What did papa and I work for all our life, only you should have something? You shouldn't feel ashamed, darling. He should feel ashamed."

There was a little silence while Mrs. Levinson poked little lakes in the linen and then sent her needle traveling dexterously round the shores. Bessie let her eyes wander pensively down the tree-bordered street. It was one of those shrub-decorated, park-tended, colorfully named streets which distinguish Flatbush from other sections of the borough that are merely Brooklyn. Every house on the street was the kind which—pictured in a suburban-real-estate booklet—brings a certain look into the eye of the urban householder that bodes ill for the urban landlord. Every garden showed the loving care of a gardener—of two gardeners, I should say—the Cincotta brothers, fifteen dollars a month, gardens tended in summer, lawns sodded in spring, furnace and snow shoveling in winter, leaves raked in the fall.

"You know, darling," Mrs. Levinson went on, "it

ain't because I don't want to keep on giving. What I got is yours. When I'm gone you get it all. You could have it to-day if you need it. All I want is enough I shouldn't have to beg in my old age my son-in-law for a crust. But I see it's a mistake, giving you. The more you get from me the less he bothers himself. And you can't stand that krenk all the time. I can't understand such a gut. Don't he know things is gone up?"

"Of course I've told him enough times. But all he says is 'We can't afford it.' "

"If I knew before you married him he was such a gut d'ye think he'd get my Bessie? No! I thought really he's the grandest feller in Noo York."

"He is, mamma—really. In everything but money he's grand. He isn't a crank. He's satisfied with everything I put on the table, so long as it isn't fish or pudding. He doesn't expect me to stick round the house all the time like some girls have to. We're out every night and I have all the freedom in the world. He never asks me where I was or with whom. He trusts me absolutely and I—I trust him. And that's an awful lot, mamma—you know it."

"Sure I know it! A woman chaser you couldn't cure except you put him in a coffin and nail down the lid. Even old age don't cure him. And a card player you could waste your lungs out you wouldn't cure him. But a gut! That's why I want you should put your feet down, Bessie, before it's too late. A gut, if you begin young enough you could cure him."

Bessie sighed.

"I'd be so happy if I didn't have that constant aggravation about money. You know, with Ruthie growing up I'll need more and more."

"You're telling me?"

"He's so good every other way. You remember when Ruthie was sick how he rocked her in his arms and made me get my rest so I could look after her the next day."

"Positively! If he wasn't no good I'd tell you to give him a good kick out. Irving's a good boy. All he needs is a operation on his pocketbook. Maybe if you leave him once—"

"Oh," interposed Bessie hastily, "I couldn't! Oh, no! I never could! And if I did I'd go right back to him. I'm not made that way. I'm different—"

"Sure! You're made different from every other woman that loves her husband. Sure! Well, all right—don't leave him already. But something you got to do. He's got to feel his responsibilities. If he marries a girl from a nice family he's got to keep her nice. If he's got children it's got to cost him money. A lot it's my fault, Bessie. He knows you don't want for nothing because mamma's always here with her hand in the pocket. And that reminds me—I wasn't going to tell you. But I should see you smiling again. I ordered for you a coat to-day by Wolper's—moleskin."

"Moleskin!"

"Yeh. I promised you a coat and I told him if he'll come down on the price I'll take the moleskin. And

tokisch he come down, so I give him the order. You had the last time sealskin."

"Oh, mamma, it's too wonderful! I don't know how to thank you! Moleskin! Oh, mamma!"

She was on her knees before the rocker, her arms about her mother's shoulders and on her face such a look of rapture as—well, as can only appear on the face of a pretty girl who has just been promised a moleskin coat.

"Oh, mamma, you're too good to me!"

"Th—th—listen to her! Ain't you good to me too? That's my happiness. At the Ladies' Auxiliary everyone used to say to me, 'Levinson, your Bessie is the best-dressed girl in Flatbush.' That's my pleasure. Thanksgiving you'll have the coat. You should wear it in good health. Only I wish your husband was giving it to you. You'd have more satisfaction with it."

A shadow crossed Bessie's face. She got up and stood looking out at the bit of street framed by the window.

"Never mind. Maybe if we'll make a successful operation on his pocketbook before Thanksgiving he'll pay for the coat. Then you could buy for my money instead a lav'leer like Essie's."

"What a chance!" smiled Bessie, waving to Ruthie, who had just roller-skated into view.

"Never mind what a chance! Already while I'm talking I got a grand idea. Ring for Susan and I'll tell you. Don't look so scared! Th' old mamma wouldn't tell you nothing wrong. Even it's funny—

positively. Lots of good cures sounds funny, only not for the patient. Oh, Susan, two cups coffee, please! And call Miss Ruthie in. She should have a glass milk."

As she kissed her daughter good-by an hour later Mrs. Levinson warned her:

"Remember, darling, if you bust, hold in your temper—and no tears. Remember, a good cure you couldn't make in a minute. Patience you got to have. If you don't cure him now your whole life you'll have an aggravation with him about the money, so hold in your horses if it takes a year. If he's cured it's worth it, ain't it?"

"Oh, mamma!"

"Also, begin it and keep it up! No rachmonis on him! And no crying! Be smart! Remember, a German Jew knows how to get up early in the morning. So his wife got to learn how to stay up the night before."

"Irving," began Bessie innocently, seating herself firmly on his lap in the darkest corner of the screened-in porch of their King's Highway, stucco, one-family, detached house. It was September, but warm enough to be comfortable out of doors. "Irving, do your help downtown keep raising you?"

He jerked away his coat and settled her comfortably on his knee. Her head rested just below his collar bone. He was the kind of big man against whom it is easy to be comfortable. Good looking, too, with clear blue-black eyes and a square blue-black chin. His

small ears were set close to his head, on top of which rolled wave on wave of smooth black hair.

"I should say!" he answered, patting her arm. "Every minute another!"

"What do you do?"

"What can I do? I got to give it to them."

"Well, Irving, Annie just raised me five dollars and struck for me to give out the flat wash to the laundry, so I'll have to ask you for some extra money."

"Now looka here, Bessie!" An ominous note crept into Irving Apfel's gentle voice. He was like an organ with one stop marked "Money," and when you pulled out that stop the organ took on a special distinct tone—a closed, wary, defensive tone. "I give you a certain amount to run the house on and you got to get along on it."

"But, Irving, forty dollars isn't enough."

"Forty dollars is a lot of money. That's the trouble with you, Bessie. You wasn't brought up to realize the value of money. And besides we can't afford any more."

"But, dear, what do you want me to do? Annie won't stay for that."

"You couldn't expect me to be worried about every little thing round the house, could you? I give you the money and that's your job—to see you come out on it. I don't bother you every time my help downtown gets a roppel."

"No, you just draw a little more money. I won't bother you with details either, Irving, but I must have more money—prices have gone up so."

"You're telling me? Ain't I sweating blood account of it? You couldn't tell me nothing about prices that I couldn't tell you twice as much."

"I just can't get along any more on forty dollars. I'm sure your business throws off much more than that. I'm coming down sometime and take a look at your books. I think a wife has a right to know how much her husband is making."

"Bessie, you better not begin like that. I don't mix in your business and don't you mix in mine. Frankly, I wouldn't let you see my books. Once you let a woman see how much money you got, and pcht! she's got a use for all of it. No, I know how much I can give you. Something we got to save for sickness or trouble."

"But, Irving, I thought you were doing so well?"

"No business is so good that you could draw out all the cream and still have it grow. Something you got to put back."

"Of course, but do we have to deny ourselves everything? What good is the money if I'm never to have anything out of it?"

"You will have. What d'you think I'm working for? Only so you and Ruthie shouldn't want—"

"But I do want—lots of things. And Ruthie too. Now! We only live once, Irving—"

"Sure! And if we listen to the women we die in the poorhouse. A woman can't understand business. In business you got to have what's called a budget. A budget is—you allow yourself so much for overhead, so much for living, so much for everything—

all figgered out. That's how we figger the profits. But if you begin drawing out here fifty dollars and there a hundred the end of the year you don't know where you stand. And before you know it you're bankrupted."

"Oh, Irving, you know that what I want won't bankrupt you! I want just what it costs to run the house and clothe Ruthie and myself without taking money from mamma. Surely that won't bankrupt you!"

She retired into the silences, but when he, too, remained intrenched behind an impenetrable wall of stillness she girded up her loins afresh and went forth to give him battle.

"I want you to give me a hundred dollars a week," she announced with more courage than she felt, "and—and—a fur coat."

It lacked a certain ring of sincerity—of spontaneity—as though it were a distasteful lesson she had learned with difficulty and schooled herself to recite. He failed to notice it.

"You're crazy, Bessie! What d'you think my business is—the Standard Oil? A fur coat! Ain't you got a fur coat?"

"It's seven years old, Irving. It's about worn out."

Again Irving withdrew into the silences. And again distastefully she hounded him out.

"You see," her tone was full of apology, "I have to have something for the winter. A decent cloth coat costs a fortune this year. And a fur coat, while it's a lot of money, still it lasts a good many years."

"I thought your mother was talking something about a fur coat for you?"

"She—she changed her mind."

"Changed her mind? Why?"

"She's going to get me a lavalieré instead."

"Let her better buy you the coat. You could use it more."

"She won't. She says it's about time you paid for some of your wife's clothes, and if you couldn't afford to dress a wife any better than a servant girl you—"

"She says I dress my wife like a serv—"

"Sh-h, Irving! Don't yell so! Mrs. Yittelman is moving her rubber plant, but it's only an excuse to hear what we're talking about. Mamma says she isn't going to give Ruthie or me another thing."

"Let her not!"

"That's just what I told her, Irving. If that's the way she feels about it she needn't buy me a coat. My husband would get me one." Somehow the latter part of this speech fell short of being as convincing as the first part. Poor Bessie! Just when she should have handed him the fountain pen and pointed to the dotted line her heart failed her and, "You—you will, won't you, Irving?" she asked very shakily.

"No!" replied Irving, lifting her from his lap and rising abruptly. "I told you before, we can't afford it!"

And he strode angrily into the house. When he saw her come into the living room after him he braced himself for a scene. He hated a scene and he would

have done anything in the world to prevent one; anything except of course—if you gave a woman money every time she wept a little where would you land? To his surprise there was no scene. Quite amicably she came and sat beside him on the couch.

"Irving," she said, "did you really mean it when you said you couldn't afford to draw more than forty dollars a week out of your business?"

"Positively!"

"And if you drew out more than that it would bankrupt you?"

"I said if you begin drawing out more than you figger in your budget you'll get in deeper and deeper and before you know it you're bankrupted. Sure!"

"Well then—"

Bessie sighed once, gulped, and if Irving had been gifted with an extra sense he might have heard the splash of the Rubicon.

"Irving, I've been wrong. I didn't realize just how we were fixed. Now I understand. From now on I'm going to be different, Irving. From now on I'm going to save."

For a breath Irving was slightly staggered. For another breath he sought shrewdly the ebony-hued occupant of the woodpile. But at the third breath he fell. He smiled. He was at peace. Over the sore spot of Irving Apfel's life was spread a beneficent ointment.

It was the following night that Bessie met him at the door in a blue-and-white-checked bungalow apron.

"Annie out?" he queried in surprise.

"Annie's gone." And at his astonished look, "Yes, I didn't have the money to raise her. And, anyway, I don't think poor people like us can afford to keep a maid. I can manage fine without her."

He was vaguely troubled. He did not exactly approve of the step, but he said nothing. She must have worked hard, the kid, to fix up supper and all. Potato soup, fish, rice, beans and chocolate pudding. He did not care much for fish and he never ate pudding—but he ate everything.

"We have to have fish sometimes," she explained. "Meat is a luxury these days and poor people like us can't afford luxuries."

He had to laugh. His Bessie—the most spoiled girl in Brooklyn! You could see it was all in the bringing up. Her mother had spoiled her—always giving her everything she wanted. After supper he helped with the dishes.

"We go with the Bendheims to the movies, don't we?"

"I had to call it off," replied Bessie. "We have no one to leave with Ruthie, you know."

"Oh!" said Irving without enthusiasm. Then, struck by a new thought, "Do we have to stay home every night?"

"Oh, no, mamma will come over and stay with Ruthie once every week or so."

"Oh!" said Irving with even less enthusiasm. They were in the habit of spending about six nights a week away from home. On the seventh there was usually company. Irving looked round his cozy living room,

a troubled question in his eye. Nothing in the room in any way answered the question. He did not quite know what to do with himself. It was a little too cool to sit outdoors. He had never read a book in his life. He picked up the Millinery Guide and sank down on the loose-cushioned tapestry-upholstered couch. Bessie gave him the fleetingest of kisses on her way to the piano.

For fifteen minutes he sat idly turning the pages of the Millinery Guide. Then he spoke.

"Bessie," he said, "can't you play something else than those scales? It's giving me a headache already."

"I'm sorry." Bessie, reaching up for a volume of *études* was all sweet contrition. "You see, having all the work to do to-day, I didn't get a chance to practice at all. And you wouldn't want me to neglect my music, I know."

She played for two and a half hours, while Irving fell asleep on the tapestry-upholstered couch. At eleven she woke him and they went upstairs. He wound up the alarm clock with just a shade more force than it absolutely required. And when he pulled up the shade he snapped the string. Somehow into the beneficent ointment had crept the inevitable fly.

It was a week later that he really felt compelled to say something to Bessie. He hated to do it, but fish three times in one week! Enough was plenty. And the night before there had been bread pudding—his particular hate.

"Bessie," he began as gently as he could, meaning to lead up to the subject of fish very tactfully, "how

comes it we ain't had no chicken since the fall of Jerusalem?"

"Chicken!" Bessie jumped up to clear away the fish plates. "Chicken! Poor people like us can't afford it."

"Th—th—listen to her! So poor we ain't that once in a week we can't have a little chicken."

"I should say not! I have my budget all worked out. And you know how it is—you have to stick to your figures. If you begin, a chicken here, a bottle of cream there, you get in deeper and deeper and before you know it—Look!" She set down the crumber and reached him something from behind the clock. "My bank book," she explained. "I opened an account."

"It don't seem possible," remarked her husband. "What come over you?"

"I told you the other night—I hadn't realized before. I have to save. Especially as mamma won't help me out any more."

She set the coffee tray on the table.

"What's for dessert?" inquired Irving.

"Nothing," replied Bessie. "Poor people have to do without desserts."

"Now looka here, Bessie, you could carry a good thing too far! To save a little is good, but to do without food—"

"Oh, I'll see that you always have plenty of food! I'm only going to cut down on luxuries. You see, I can't spend more on food than my budget allows. I have to save."

"What you got to save for so much? What I give you you can spend."

"I should say not! Don't I have to buy clothes when mine wear out? I can't ask mamma for any more, and I won't ask you for money. I know you give me all you can afford.

"You see," she went on, "if I'm very saving I'll have a new suit by Easter. I'll probably need it pretty bad by then. And meanwhile Ruthie ought to have a coat this winter and I'm saving for that first. When I think about shoes and hats and waists and underwear and everything—gee! I feel tempted to live on oatmeal and dried herring!"

Irving said nothing about the fish. The time did not seem exactly propitious. But while drying the dishes he was rather thoughtful. He did not care for drying dishes—especially fourteen times in two weeks.

Hanging the damp towel over the rack, he inquired suddenly, "Ain't this the night for your mother to mind Ruthie?"

"Mamma isn't coming any more. I had a fight with her."

"What?"

He followed her into the living room, where she switched on the light over the piano.

"I never want to see her again after the things she said to-day about you."

"About me?"

"Uh-huh! She as good as said you were a liar—that you weren't hard up at all. She called you names—stingy and gut and oh, I just can't tell you all! She

said you had no right to let me do my own work, because you could easily afford to give me at least a hundred a week."

"She should mind her own business."

"That's what I told her. I was furious. As if you'd let me do my own work if you could afford to pay for a girl—scrubbing floors and—"

"You shouldn't scrub floors, Bessie, really. You should hire a woman."

"At three-fifty a day? And let my child do without a winter coat to pay for it? I should say not! I'll do my own work until we can afford—"

Bessie had opened the piano and the rest of the sentence was lost in a noisy attack on C major. Irving started for his hat. "And she even said"—Bessie interrupted C major at the third flight—"that soon you'd begin going out without me and neglecting me."

Irving put his hat back in the closet. A few moments he stood irresolute, his hand on the closet door. Then struck by an idea, he crossed over to the piano.

"Wouldn't nobody—Katzes or nobody come over to-night?"

"No, not a soul."

"Here then"—he laid fifty cents on the mahogany—"go to the movies. You ain't been outside the house in a week." Even, he could stand staying home, if not for the piano.

Bessie fingered the silver meditatively.

"Movies are a luxury," she ventured at length. "Do you really think we can afford—"

"*Chammer!*" He gave a short laugh. "Fifty cents I can afford!"

"But your budget. You're sure—"

"Don't talk nonsensical! Put on your hat!"

In the hall Bessie paused, irresolute.

"I'd rather not," she sighed at length. "I wouldn't enjoy it without you." And she dropped the half dollar into the bank on the mantel.

Somehow that simple act annoyed Irving out of all proportion to its size. Perhaps it was the very smallness of it that irritated. He gives her fifty cents, she should go to the movies. Not alone she don't go, but she pockets yet the fifty cents. It's all right a woman should be saving. But you know there's a limit. Fifty cents it costs you to hear her play for an hour scales. Wouldn't it give you the plotz?

It was the next morning that Irving—having looked under the porch swing and down the steps and behind the rocker began to say unkind things about the newspaper boy.

"Oh," called Bessie from the kitchen, "don't blame the boy, Irv! I cut off the order."

"You—"

"Yes. You see, it's ten cents a month extra for delivery and that's a dollar-twenty a year. And besides I thought maybe you could pick one up in the train. People are always leaving them round on the seats."

The next day Irving, who was about to take a clean shirt from the drawer, gave an exasperated bark.

"Bessie," he called down the back stairs, "you got

to change the laundry! You ought to see what them mommsers done to my shirt!"

"Oh—" Bessie was making toast. Breakfast had ceased to be a joy to Irving since toast made of stale bread had been substituted for his fresh rolls at the same time that top-of-the-bottle replaced his cream, and eggs vanished almost entirely. "Oh," said Bessie, sending her voice in the general direction of her irate lord, "it's not the laundry! I stopped sending them to the laundry. I'm learning to do them myself."

"But give a look what you done with this!"

"I know, dear, but I'll learn." She came and stood at the foot of the stairs. "Don't you remember when I made my first dress and I cried because it was botched you said it wasn't so bad—I shouldn't get discouraged—any dumb dressmaker could make a dress and a smart girl like me surely could learn? And I did, so I'll learn to press too. Any dumb wash woman can press. Poor people can't afford laundries. Aren't you coming down for breakfast, dear? I have lovely oatmeal, and the toast'll all be cold."

"I be down soon," said Irving in a licked sort of voice.

That same night she told him, "I met Lennie Wolper to-day."

"Yeh? What did he have to say?"

"He wanted to know when I was coming in to order that coat I looked at with mamma last month."

Irving became suddenly and deeply absorbed in the front page of the paper, which he had brought home three days before.

"I explained to him," went on his wife placidly, "that you couldn't afford to buy me a coat."

"What?"

"Well, isn't that the truth?"

"But d'you have to tell him?"

"Well, should I lie? He asked me why didn't I come down and I told him the truth. It's not a disgrace not to be able to afford things, is it? It's more disgrace to pretend that you can. If we're not ashamed to let the neighbors see we can't afford a girl, why should we be ashamed to tell Lennie Wolper we can't afford fur coats?"

"Bessie," said Irving, "it can't cost such a fortune to keep a girl. I maybe could give you the difference Annie raised you."

"I should say not! As long as I'm a poor man's wife I'll do my part."

"Bessie, don't keep throwing in my teeth all the time I'm a schnorrer! I ain't—"

"People who live on a salary of forty dollars—like we do—are poor people. And poor people don't need servants. And that's all there is to it."

There was quite a cold spell the end of October. Bessie had failed to engage the furnace man—for a reason which Irving was getting just a bit weary of hearing. Irving was annoyed. The girl was getting nutty with her savings. People had to have a little something, at least a little comfort in their own house. He wasn't going to be a furnace man. If she wanted to be so tight let her get up mornings and look after it herself—he wouldn't. But in the end

he did, because Bessie was so—well, he might as well call spades shippem—so damn stingy with the coal he couldn't sit in his own parlor without his feet freezing off. Of course she could stand it. She wrapped her feet in a rug and banged the piano so hard it would keep circulation in a mummy. Probably the biggest, fattest fly in Irving's ointment was that same mahogany upright which had so thrilled his soul when Bessie's Uncle Mortie presented it to them as a wedding gift. The dish towel and the coal shovel and fried codfish also in no wise added to the sum of his joys.

With November came the circus. Irving brought home three tickets. Every year it was his custom and pleasure to take his little daughter to the circus. Bessie would dress her in her best, which was very good indeed, and her proud father would take her downtown with him in the morning. How the enthusiastic and no longer young Miss Berger would gush at sight of the little vision! And how Irving would conceal beneath a strictly business air the satisfaction that made his chest to swell and his eyes to kindle! How he would be busy at his desk when Miss Berger kidnaped the wide-eyed little treasure and carried her off into the workroom! How he would frown at his mail as the little ecstatic cries drifted in to him through the open door! How she was growing, *unberufen!* And what a darling she was! She should live in good health. And what eyes she had—*unbeschrieen*, like the mamma's.

At noon Bessie would join them and he would escort

them both to lunch before the performance. This year Bessie begged to be excused.

"I'm so tired out—a whole day's rest without Ruthie will do me more good. And Rosie Katz said wouldn't you please take Marjorie? She can't take her, but she'll give me the money for the ticket."

Of course Irving wouldn't say anything. But wasn't it funny for Bessie, when he paid for the tickets, to take the money from Rosie Katz and put it in her bank? Wasn't it funny a girl so fine in other ways could be so small about money?

The Saturday of the circus Marjorie appeared at eight sharp in a beaver-colored coat with nutria trimmings and hat to match. She looked, *unberufen*, like an angel in heaven in that coat and hat. At least so Mrs. Monchik, of The Tots' Shop, said after selling Mrs. Katz the coat. There was another coat of velvet with real beaver. Heaven knows what she would have looked like in that—only it was too much money.

While Marjorie was still turning round for her host's inspection Bessie sent down Ruthie, also hatted and coated and ready. Irving took one look at his daughter.

"Bessie," he called upstairs, "what's the matter with Ruthie?"

"With Ruthie?"

"Yes—her coat! She looks something terrible!"

Bessie came clattering down full of consternation.

"I never saw the child looking like that! What's the matter with her? She looks like a scarecrow!"

"Why, Irving, how can you talk that way about the

baby? Maybe she hasn't got a new coat, but that's no reason for calling her names!"

"But look how her arms are hanging out of the sleeves! And her legs are sticking out a mile!"

"Well, she's growing. I can't put weights on her head. It's a little short on her, I admit. But it's not torn or anything."

"Well, I can't take her out looking like such a ne-besch—and that's all! Go up and put something else on her."

"She has nothing else. I'm ashamed of you, Irving. To act that way about your child—and such a good child too! I never heard of a father being ashamed of his own child."

"I'm not ashamed of the child. I'm ashamed the way she looks—like such a poorhouse!"

"Well, it's no disgrace to be poor. And certainly the child can't help it if you don't make as much as Mannie Katz."

"Mannie Katz! Ha-ha! The cashier in my bank!"

"Well, he must be making more money than you, anyway, because he gives Rosie sixty a week and his Christmas bonus. If you gave me sixty a week maybe we could af—"

It was about here that the import of the conversation began to take root in the inner brain of Ruthie Apfel, who had been pondering. Of a sudden she set up a wail.

"I want a new coat! I want a new coat! And a hat with fur—like Marjorie's!"

"Hush, mamma's baby! Don't cry! The poor

child! It breaks my heart to hear her cry. If we could afford it I'd tell you to stop off at Monchik's on the way in and buy her a coat."

"Where is Monchik's?"

"Ruthie knows. But I wouldn't hear of it. We can't af—"

"Bessie, I—I was going to surprise you. I got a big order yesterday. I'll make a good profit on it. The child could have a coat—she shouldn't look like a joke paper."

"But, Irving! Your budget!"

"Pff!" He made a magnificent gesture.

"Oh, Irving, I'm afraid you're inclined to be extravagant! This coat isn't worn out yet."

"She could wear it for school. Come on, Ruthie. You show papa the way to Mrs. Monchik's."

"Don't let Mrs. Monchik talk you into anything expensive, Irving. She'll try to sell you a coat like Marjorie's. I know her. Don't let her talk you in. Do you hear?"

"I hear," said Irving, kissing her good-by.

"Get something serviceable, Irving. Something not too fancy for poor people. We don't have to dress our child up like Katz's. Don't do anything foolish, Irving."

"You know me!" said Irving.

She did.

After he had safely turned the corner she went to the phone. Mrs. Monchik was just opening the Tots' Shop for the day.

"Sure! I understand perfectel. Yes, I remember—

the velvet coat with the beaver. Don't worry! He wouldn't get away without the coat. I could sell a man any day easier than a woman. A man is a cinch to sell. I got it in the winder already—the coat and the hat. And Mrs. Apfel, you should worry, huh, if he takes along a yella organdie dress like Marjorie Katz's and effsche a hand-embroidered Princess slip for under, huh, Mrs. Apfel? Don't worry! I know your taste—champagne. You could trust me, Mrs. Apfel."

And Mrs. Apfel did.

The invitation arrived for the engagement party of Irving's brother Sidney and Helen Stern, Thanksgiving eve, at the Ritz.

"I'll write Mrs. Stern and explain why we can't go," said Bessie.

"How d'ye mean, we can't go?"

"How can I go? In a shirt waist and skirt?"

"Where's your evening dress?"

"That old black one I got two years ago?"

"Yeh, that black one you always looked so good in."

"It was torn and I made a bathing suit out of it last summer."

"Th—th—you shouldn't have done it. Maybe with a little fixing you could have wore it."

"Well, I needed a bathing suit, and I thought this year—"

"Well, you'll have to get yourself a little evening dress."

"I should say not! What do poor people need with evening dresses?"

"For my brother's engagement—"

"For one night I should spend a hundred dollars on an evening dress?"

"It wouldn't need to cost you a hundred dollars. You'll buy a piece goods and make a dress. What'll it cost you?"

"It won't cost me anything, Irving, because I need my money for other things."

"Who's talking your money? Buy the goods and I'll give you what you lay out."

"It's not only a dress, Irving. Slippers and stockings and—"

"Nu? Does my brother get engaged every day? You could wear the same things to the wedding."

"Is it worth while getting bankrupt just for one night?"

"*Frisch! Gesund! Meschuge!* Do people get bankrupt from buying once a piece goods for a dress?"

"Well, fifty dollars here, a hundred there—"

"Don't talk foolish! Go to-morrow and get it! You ain't got much time."

The next night he asked her, "Well, did you get the goods for the dress?"

"N—no, Irving. Do you really think we can af—"

"Bessie, I don't want to hear no more from this nonsense. Ain't it enough I'm telling you it's all right? Get it to-morrow! Remember, you only got till a week from Sunday!"

The next night he asked her again, "Did you get the goods?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Well, there was only one piece at Steinberg's I liked and it was too much money."

"How much?"

"Forty dollars. Isn't that ridiculous? And there was nothing else I'd take for a present. You know, I'm not in love with the whole idea. I don't think we can af—"

Irving pulled a roll of money from his pocket.

"Here! I don't want to hear no more! To-morrow you'll get it, if that's the only thing that'll make you happy."

"But shoes—"

"Shoes too—whatever you need!"

Sunday he asked her, "Well, how's the dress coming along?"

"I didn't start it yet."

"You didn't! When you going to begin?"

"I don't know. I'm sort of scared to cut into it—such dear goods. I might spoil it alone."

"Couldn't you get someone to help you?"

"Well, I don't like to ask mamma. When I had the fight with her about you being stingy she said I'd be asking her before long for help."

"No, don't ask her favors. I'll give you the money. Hire somebody."

Monday night showed no progress. Bessie had been

unable to hire anybody—neither did Tuesday. Irving grew excited.

"How you going to get it finished if here it's Tuesday night and you didn't begin it yet? What you going to do?"

"The only one I can think of is Miss Brush. But she's estimate and she gets thirty-five dollars for the needle—"

"If we got to have it we got to have it. Take her the goods—here's the money!"

"Oh, no, I'll have her send you the bill—in case she needs anything extra for trimming. It seems a shame to spend all that money—"

"Don't begin that again!"

"I was going to say—and then wear such a shabby coat!"

"Who'll see the coat? You'll go in quick and check it. We'll get there early and we'll leave late. Nobody'll see the coat."

The dress was a wonderful success—quite the prettiest dress Bessie Apfel had ever owned. Irving was beaming. In spite of the fact that the dress, and so forth, had left him no change out of a century and a quarter he was in high good humor. He liked going out. Especially when his wife looked—*unberufen*.

"And here," remarked said wife, "is a surprise!" And held up for inspection a moleskin coat.

"Wh—wh—"

"Don't get excited! It isn't mine. Rosie Katz loaned it to me."

"It's an elegant coat."

"You bet! Mannie made some money on the side and blew her. It must have cost at least eight hundred dollars. He must be an awfully smart fellow. Just think of making eight hundred dollars on one deal!"

"Pooh!" began Irving, but thought better of it.

Bessie pirouetted slowly before the forward-tilted mirror of her white-enamel bureau.

"She's a darling to lend it to me. I was over to-day to leave Ruthie there for the night, and when Rosie heard I had to wear my old Hudson seal she offered herself to lend me this. But you know, Irv, she had an altogether wrong idea about you. She thought you were tight—you know, stingy about buying me things.

"Of course I set her right. I explained that we just can't afford to have the things they have, because your business doesn't throw off enough—"

"Looka here, Bessie! You got to learn not to talk about my business!"

"Oh, I didn't, Irving! I didn't say a word about your business. All I said was it didn't throw off enough for us to have the things they have. You give me all you can afford, and if we were to spend more than we do it would hurt the business."

"Bessie!"

"And maybe you'd go bankrupt."

"Bessie, are you crazy? You fool, you—" He began to pace up and down the bedroom furiously, clenched fist pounding into open palm behind his back.

"Don't you know Mannie Katz is the cashier in my bank? Ain't you got nothing in your head but emptiness? How do you think it helps my standing if you go round and telling the world I'm going bankrupt? How do you think I'm going to look when I go to my bank for an accommodation after my wife tells the cashier I'm going bust?"

"Oh, no, Irving; I didn't say you were going bust, because you're not! I'm going to see that you don't. I only said that if you drew out more than the forty dollars a week you give me you'd be bankrupt. You said it yourself. Those were your very—"

"But what I say to you you don't have to tell Mannie Katz, do you?"

"Oh, we needn't bluff them! Rosie sees the way I do my own work and she knows I haven't had a new rag all season, and Mannie even remarked that I used to dress so well and you must have had a bad year. Well, I didn't want to say that mamma used to buy my clothes—I was ashamed—so I didn't say anything."

"Come on, we'll be late to the engagement." Irving's face was devoid of beam. "Only don't wear that woman's coat."

"You're right, Irving. People would think it was mine and that we were full of money, and I hate bluff." She slipped into her old Hudson seal. "There, that's better! It's more suitable for a poor man's wife. No use giving people the impression you're something you aren't."

"It don't look bad—that coat."

"No, it's not torn or anything. Besides, if I wore the other, people might begin to wonder where we got the money from."

"You ain't going to leave it laying round the room, are you?"

"Oh, no, of course not! Would you mind running over to Rosie's and telling her you don't like me to—"


"Positively not! I wouldn't go near that—we ain't got time!"

"Maybe just for safety's sake I better wear it."

"Well," replied her husband, "maybe you better."

By the time they reached the Ritz, Irving was beaming 16-k beams all over the place. He did like to go out. Especially an occasion like this—it didn't happen every day—and things had been very quiet for him lately—oh, very quiet!

And as the evening progressed his radiant good humor increased in volume and intensity until not even his brother Sidney—not even the father of the girl—outbeamed him. Well, nobody had nothing on Bessie. You had to give it to that girl—she was a picture, she should live in health. Everybody was talking about her. She was the center of everything. Women, girls, old men, young men—all paid her tribute. How the sight of it all warmed the very cockles of his heart—wherever they are. Look at her over there with old man Kopitz of the Popular Bank, and Professor Abrahams, the great Abrahams from West End Avenue, who had brought her into the world twenty-five years before. Two real somebodies, and how they were enjoying themselves with Bessie. Irving wondered what



they were laughing at so much. Vaguely he felt that they were talking about him.

He excused himself from Blossom Stern, who was a nice girl but *miess*, and crossed the room. But just before he reached them, Kopitz's son, Stanley Cobb, had whirled her away in a waltz. The two old men greeted him cordially.

"Well," said old man Kopitz, "I don't have to ask you how things are going. I can see for myself. Your wife looks like the Queen of Jerusalem."

Irving put to shame every incandescent bulb in the place.

"A man must be dragging a bushel of money out of the flower-and-feather business," went on the banker, "to doll a woman up like that these days. How many lofts you got now, Irving?"

"Two," replied Irving modestly, "in the Ganimede Building."

"Two lofts in the Ganimede Building!" The banker shook a white-fringed head from side to side like the figure of the China mandarin on his mother's whatnot. "And I remember when he went peddling for Levy and Gutlohn! It seems like yesterday. Two lofts! But the minute I saw Mrs. Irving looking like a million dollars I knew. I used to think to myself, there's the boy that's the future flower-and-feather king of this country. Now I know it. You're a coming man, Irving. Why don't you drop in and see me some time—at the Popular?"

Somebody claimed his attention and he drifted away. Irving turned his effulgent face toward the doctor.

"Bessie is a good advertisement, isn't she?" remarked the professor.

Irving was too full for words. He merely nodded.

"I tell you, Apfel, it pays a man to keep his wife looking right. No man ever got any further from crying poor. Prosperity makes prosperity. I bet if he hadn't seen Bessie he wouldn't have remembered that he always thought you would be the flower-and-feather king of this country, heh, Apfel?"

"I shouldn't be surprised," replied the heir apparent.

"Well, I'm glad you're getting along so well, Apfel. And I'm glad to see you're taking such good care of Bessie. She looks fine. Don't let her work too hard. She's inclined to go into things too strong. She'll stand it for a while and then she'll go to pieces all of a sudden. But I don't have to tell you. A man like you wouldn't let a girl like Bessie do a day's work if he had to pawn his shirt to hire someone to help her. We Jewish men know how to take care of our wives, heh, Apfel?"

"Bessie," remarked Irving on the way home in the taxi, "how much costs such a coat?"

"Oh, about eight hundred dollars."

"Bessie, go order one."

"What? You must be crazy, Irving! We can't afford such a thing!"

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe it seems like a lot of money, but a fur coat ain't a thing you buy every day."

"Don't be ridiculous, Irving! For a woman who does her own work—"

"I was going to say, Bessie, you got to get a girl. It ain't right for you to go on working so hard. All of a sudden you'll go to pieces."

"Irving, the engagement must have gone to your head! Do you want to go bankrupt?"

"Don't get excited, I wouldn't go bankrupt! My business is going very good."

"Even if it is, no business is so good that you can draw out all the cream."

"Listen, Bessie! We only live once. And now while we're young—"

"But, Irving, we have to save! Sickness or trouble—"

"We'll save too."

"Irving, you talk as if your business was the Standard Oil."

He commenced to laugh.

"To hear you talk, Bessie, you'd think I didn't know what I could take out from my own business. Why, Bessie, last year I made—"

There was a little awkward pause, while Bessie waited expectantly and Irving gave a little cough.

"I made a lot of money," he concluded.

"Oh," said Bessie, "you think everything is a lot of money! You thought forty dollars a week was a lot of money! Now Mannie Katz—"

"Hah!" Irving exploded. "Mannie Katz! Why, I make three times what that piker draws a year."

This time Bessie laughed.

"Oh, Irving! You'd be making twelve thousand dollars a year!"

"Well?"

There was a little pregnant silence and then Bessie murmured, "I don't believe it."

"What d'ye mean you don't believe it? D'ye think I'm lying?"

"Oh, no! I mean—you must be mistaken."

"What d'ye mean mistaken? It's on the books."

"Maybe you made a mistake in figuring it up."

"Say, ain't I got for twenty dollars a week a book-keeper? Ain't there such a thing as trial balances and—"

"Anyway, I can't believe it."

Irving was angry.

"Looka here, Bessie! You'll come in my office the next time you're downtown and I'll show you on the books if I'm a liar."

"Oh, I didn't mean that! Only—oh, Irving, you must be joking!"

"I tell you I ain't!"

"The next thing you'll be telling me I ought to spend a hundred dollars a week for the house!"

He took it on high.

"From now on I bring you home a hundred dollars a week for the house. And I don't want no saving on it neither, d'ye hear? I'm full up to the neck from this saving."

Sometimes when Bessie Apfel comes into her husband's loft and casts an expert eye over his ledgers,

seemingly quite at home with columns and credits, debits and trial balances, a quizzical look comes into the eye of the future F. and F. king of America. Almost he suspects that he has in some ways underrated her.

Could she really, in spite of that *au secours* look in her eyes, be so very smart—even smarter than—

It does not seem possible, and yet—

How was it the very day after his brother's engagement Mrs. Levinson, who had not shown an orthopedically shod toe inside his home in six weeks, appeared, smiling as though nothing had happened?

And that very same day Annie reappeared, seemingly untouched by employment sharks in a period of almost two months in spite of her jewel-like qualities.

And once, seeing Ruth start off for school in her old coat, he wondered why it had seemed so awfully short to him before and why her arms had seemed to dangle so impotently from the sleeves, whereas now she did not look so very bad in it.

And at these times he tries to remember just how it was he began to let his wife look over his books—a thing he had always disapproved of. For once you let a woman see how much money you are making—and pcht! She has a use for all of it.

But not Bessie of course. Bessie was different. Bessie's fault lay the other way. Bessie had a tendency to be—well, saving. What a job he had had to make her take that moleskin coat that was really a bargain because of Rosie Katz deciding at the last

minute she didn't like it! And how Bessie looked in it! She did a man credit, Bessie did.

He took pains to explain it to her.

"You got to look nice, Bessie. Prosperity makes prosperity. If you go round looking like a schnorrer's wife, soon everybody'll have me bankrupted. You das-sent make a poor face, Bessie. We can't afford it."

SEVEN: MATZOTHS CAST UPON THE WATERS

IRVING APFEL'S rather good-looking countenance screwed itself violently toward the left and then jerked spasmodically toward the right in an involuntary effort to follow, in the bathroom mirror, the erratic contortions of a particularly unreasonable full-dress tie.

"What's the matter with this damn thing anyway?" he exploded at length.

Bessie—for all the world suggestive of the rays of a fading sunset reflected across a foaming glass of vanilla ice-cream soda—at once so ethereally poetic and so materially delectable did she look in her new evening dress—stepped out of the bedroom, where she had been testing at different angles, on her snug, well-filled little bodice, the effectiveness of the diamond-and-platinum bar pin which her mother had given her, almost eight years before, as an engagement present.

"Matter, dear?" she asked; and catching sight of the distorted face of her lord above the wreck of his full-dress tie she turned him about and began with cool deft fingers to undo the abortive fruit of all his labors, nimbly piloting the ends once more into preliminary position.

"Are you going to wear your high hat?" she inquired, measuring the two ends, one against the other.

Irving squirmed, uncomfortably conscious of her strangle hold upon his tie.

"No," he answered at length, defiantly. But he kept his glance well above her head, all snowed in under drifts of fluffy hair. "The Junior League ain't such a swell affair—away up there in Harlem; and anyway"—gathering conviction as he went along—"who sees it if I have it on or I don't? We go in Yittelman's car and we come home in Yittelman's car, don't we?" he concluded.

To his surprise and relief Bessie did not pursue the subject.

"Do you think your sister Rae will like Leo Yittelman?"

"Will it rain next Sunday a week? Could I tell something with that *mischugene*? A beauty she never was—money she ain't got—and thirty she wouldn't see again. But she picks like she was Lillian Russell hung round with diamonds and in high school yet. I ask you—what is she got to pick so much?"

"She's considered very bright." Bessie gave a last pat to the once fractious tie, now lying in docile orthodoxy beneath the square chin of its late antagonist.

Irving scowling at himself in the mirror smoothed imaginary violations of the patent-leather smoothness of his hair, which rolled, shiny wave on shiny wave, straight back from his square, sloping forehead.

Bessie, lingering against the bathroom door, swung idly to and fro.

"I don't think he's very bright," she admitted.

"You're telling me?" Irving ran a tentative finger

over his closely shaved chin. "Between you and I, he's a damn fool."

Bessie did not contradict him. "But," she suggested hopefully, "lots of bright women marry simple men. And he hasn't a bad face, dear."

"My enemies should have such a face," retorted her spouse ungraciously.

"He makes a lot of money too." She preceded him into the bedroom, and picking up her bar pin tried it once more across her low, tightly draped little bodice. "And he's got a nice disposition."

Irving transferred his change from the dresser to his pocket. "Listen, Bessie, no matter how much you talk him up I wouldn't marry him. And I bet Rae don't neither. To tell you the truth I don't know why you begun this business."

Well, Bessie thought it would be a favor to both sides.

"You and your favors. Ain't you got enough to do without always looking round how you can do for everybody favors? Favors! And for such a lemon like Leo Yittelman."

"He's not so bad, really. And he has good manners."

"Save your compliments to tell Rae. And the same time, you could remind her she ain't such a *mazir* herself, even if she does earn forty dollars a week stenographing."

The bar pin in place, Bessie picked up a silver mirror and regarded her back hair. "It would mean a lot to your mother to see her settled down, and she might

like Leo—especially if he was a little more stylish.”

“Him? Stylish?” Irving reached for his vest. “Like my Prince Albert, he’s stylish.”

“So I thought,” Bessie went on, ignoring his cynicism, “we’d better fix him up a little. I’m sure, with your high hat—”

“Bessie,” cut in Irving firmly, “you don’t begin that. He don’t get my high hat.”

“But, Irving! You’re not going to wear it yourself.”

“Is that a reason I got to leave him have it?”

“Think what it would mean to your mother to see Rae married!”

• “How does by my lending him a hat make Rae right away get married to him?”

“Don’t forget how much first impressions count! And you know how people always look at you when you wear it. Of course”—she helped him into his coat, smoothing it across the shoulders—“he can’t possibly look like you do in it! Still—”

Bessie could feel his defenses wavering.

“You just ought to see how nice he looks in it,” she announced, jumping into the breach.

“What? He’s got it already?”

She reached up and kissed him on the chin. “I knew you wouldn’t wear it unless I made a scene. So when he came over before and he had on a brown derby and a ready-made tie—”

“You right away loaned him my high hat. And”—he faced her accusingly—“you loaned him my best full-dress tie!”

Bessie was busy with her long gloves.

"Bessie, this is got to stop!"

"Oh, Irving," she remonstrated, "you always make such a fuss about a little favor."

"There you go again—'little favor.' We're always doing everybody favors. Especially them Yittelmans. If it ain't him it's her. And now it's the brother. What do they ever do for us?"

"Isn't Leo driving us in?"

"Ain't we introducing him to a grand girl—smart, stylish, from a nice family? Don't he have to drive himself in? If you could even call it driving. He ought to thank us yet we take a chance with our life with such driving."

"Don't talk so loud, dear. I left the back door open, and I think that's Leo now."

"Listen, Bessie, I warn you, if anything happens to that hat—"

"What could happen to a high hat?"

"It ain't what could—but if it does—I warn you—"

"Sh-h! That's Leo."

"I warn you"—he lowered his voice but refused to leave his warning unuttered—"it's the last time you get me to loan anything. You could stand on your head."

"That you, Mr. Yittelman?" Bessie called down the back stairs.

Irving followed her into the hall. Again he warned her: "Remember now, if anything happens to that—"

"I heard you. Now be still."

"If anything happens to—"

"We'll be right down, Mr. Yittelman," called Bessie, and picking up her coat she started down the stairs. Irving followed.

"Remember if anything happens to that—"

"Good evening, Mr. Apfel. I got to thank you for the loan of your hat—"

"You're welcome," replied Mr. Apfel, impelled more by custom than a strict respect for the truth.

"It's no use to argue, Bessie; you heard what I said."

Bessie picked up the black cotton which had rolled to the floor and went on darning.

"Some day," continued her husband, slapping the mahogany music cabinet, "you'll learn when I say a thing I mean it."

"Don't be silly." Bessie regarded the gaping heel of a sock. "How could you go through life without ever doing anyone a favor?"

"How could I? I'll tell you how. When I'll need an umbrella I'll have one. When I'll need a monkey wrench—remember how your friend Blumenfeld loaned my monkey wrench to move with? And then he invites us over for supper and gives me back the monkey wrench and I got to *schlepp* it from Staten Island to Flatbush in the middle of the night? Remember?"

"Yes, I remember," sighed his wife.

Irving walked up and down the living room, one fist pounding the other palm behind his back.

"Never did I loan a man a dollar yet that I didn't

right away have from him a enemy. 'Am I telling the truth?"

"But you can't be a crab just because some things turn out wrong. How can you enjoy having things if you don't share them with others?"

"And how could you have them to enjoy if you do? Anyway I don't see nobody sharing theirs with us."

"Why, only yesterday you borrowed an egg from Mrs. Fisch—"

"Sure! And it was a rotten one. We could do without such *mitzvos*. And for that she uses all the time our telephone. It's cheaper to keep on hand a extra dozen eggs. I tell you, I'm done. I don't want to loan from the neighbors, and they shouldn't loan from me. I told you if anything happens to that hat—"

"Irving, don't talk any more about that hat!"

"Sure. He busts my hat and I shouldn't even talk about it."

"But you don't talk of anything else!"

"Well, I got a right to talk, ain't I? You loan him my hat and he busts it—"

"But he couldn't help it."

"Does that buy me a new hat?"

"You ought to be glad he wasn't killed."

"Who, me? Do I have to pay his funeral expenses? Believe me, I wouldn't miss him. But my hat, which I paid eleven dollars for—"

"Eight years ago."

"Sure! To-day you wouldn't get it for twenty."

"He felt so sorry."

"Believe me, not half so sorry as me. He needed to wear my hat! My sister Rae needs him—such a lobster—such a high-hat smasher!"

Bessie picked up her darning and departed.

"I ought to sue him," continued her husband, following her into the kitchen. "Such a feller ought to get sent to jail."

"If you only speak a little louder," remarked Bessie caustically, "Yittelmans will hear you."

"Leave them. I bet you he didn't even tell them what he—"

There was a knock at the back door, and Bessie, with a warning look at Irving, opened it. A stout, middle-aged lady with small steel-rimmed spectacles stood bowl in hand on the threshold. She was Mrs. Yittelman, sister-in-law to the smasher of high hats and foster parent to one fat, watery-eyed and pampered old fox terrier, name of Tootsie. Tootsie was the sworn pal and crony of little Ruthie Apfel and the implacable enemy of her father, Irving. The mere sound of Irving's voice set her to rumbling ominously. And though the Yittelmans by dint of scoldings, threats and whippings had brought her to the point where she no longer went into the canine for apoplexy at the sight of him, this truce was merely military necessity, and she showed the true state of her feelings by snapping at his ankles whenever her parents were not about.

"Excuse me," began Mrs. Yittelman mildly, "but could you—"

"I suppose," interrupted Irving, "you heard what happened last night?"

Bessie sent him an eloquent but utterly wasted look.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Yittelman pleasantly. "Leo was telling me you had *eppes* a little misfortune."

"Little!" roared Irving. "Did he tell you what he done to my hat?"

"No," answered the sister-in-law of the vandal innocently.

"Say, if your brother-in-law could run a automobile, then I could run a Chinese laundry! First, I tell him: 'Go Bedford Avenue.' No, he knows better—the park! You know Prospect Park, how it's full of bumps? Well, you could believe me, Mrs. Yittelman, I don't exaggerate it, if there was one bump he missed he went back and done it over again! And he ain't satisfied that he nilly bumps my wife out the back seat. It ain't enough I bite off the end from a quarter cigar and swaller it. No. He ain't satisfied till he finds himself a bump like a Adirondack Mountain. Then he gives a jump up in the air—and God knows maybe he would be flying yet if not for the top of the car."

"Th-th." Mrs. Yittelman's head wagged concern. "He could have smashed out his brains."

"Not him," said Irving bitterly. "He couldn't do nothing to his brains. But, oi, what he done to my high hat! Could you imagine," he went on, carried away by the tragedy he was depicting—"could you imagine what it looks like—my high hat—all smashed in?"

"Mr. Yittelman," observed the visitor tactfully, "used to have once such a high hat—it went together like a okkordeen."

Irving gave her a withering look. "If I want such a high hat like a accordion, Mrs. Yittelman, believe me, I know enough to buy it in the first place from a hat store. I don't need your brother-in-law to make for me no hocus-pocus with the other one."

Mrs. Yittelman strove to present matters in a more hopeful light. "You're lucky nothing worse didn't God forbid happen, Mr. Apfel. All your life you shouldn't get nothing worse smashed, please God, then *effsche* a high hat."

Irving glared at her a moment, too outraged for speech, then turned on his heel.

"Ain't I right, Mrs. Apfel?" she continued placidly, at the same time holding forth her bowl, all unconscious of how she was piling Pelion on Ossa. "Could I borrow, please, a little milk for Tootsie?"

Irving swung round in the doorway. "No!" he shouted before Bessie had a chance to answer. "We ain't got none left."

Bessie, taken aback, held her peace.

"Oh!" Mrs. Yittelman was all upset. "Leo drank up the last glass before he went away, and I got no one to send to the avenue."

"Ain't that too bad?" said Irving hypocritically.

"Poor Tootsie," sighed Mrs. Yittelman. "She ain't allowed to have no meat and she wouldn't take her puppy biscuits only soaked in milk."

Bessie eyed her spouse sternly behind Mrs. Yittelman's departed back. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself? There's a quart of milk in that ice box, and Tootsie will have to go to bed hungry."

"It wouldn't hurt her. She's too fat already. I told you if my high hat—"

"Oh, *oh!*" Bessie gave a little shriek. "If you mention that high hat again I'll jump out of the window!"

"Well, I stick to my word. Anyway, I should feed yet such a vicious animal that's always trying to bite me in the leg."

"That's because you don't like her. Ruthie plays with her, day in, day out. To think you would let even a dog go hungry!"

"I tell you it wouldn't hurt that dog. It's time she learned to eat puppy biscuits *nicht gesoaked* in milk. If she starves to death it's her own fault. And I wouldn't break my heart!"

"No, but your child would."

"*Nicht so gefährlich.* All my life I lived without dogs and I got big too. If Tootsie dies Ruthie'll get a husband anyway. Anyhow I told you I'm done with this lending."

"Some day you'll want to borrow something from Yittelmans—"

"What, for instance? A high hat, maybe? Or Tootsie?"

"You never can tell. You might even need a dog some day."

"I should live so long," said Irving Apfel.

Next morning Irving rose late, for though when questioned accusingly by Bessie at four A. M. he stoutly maintained that he did not hear anything, and she must be dreaming if she thought she heard Tootsie wailing, still something caused him to pull the covers over his head until the arrival of the milkman next door. And for some reason he overslept.

That was how he happened to be eating his breakfast when the telephone rang at a time when he was usually New Yorkward winging via the Brighton L. Bessie was upstairs putting some finishing touches to Ruthie.

"Hello," said a strange voice, "would you please call Mrs. Fisch on the telephone?"

"No!" Irving was himself surprised at the vehemence with which he replaced the receiver. But he was just sick of them Fisches making a pay station out of his telephone. Annie was forever running across the street to call Mrs. Fisch on the phone while his dinner got cold and he got hot.

"For me?" called Bessie over the balustrade.

"No," growled Irving; "not for us."

Bessie went back to Ruthie.

The telephone rang a second time. All the muscles of Irving's throat grew tense, and a mouthful of coffee almost went down the wrong way. He snatched the receiver.

"Hello!"

"Hello," came back an equally bellicose voice, "I'd like to speak to one of the Fisches."

"Say, what do you think this is—th' aquarium?"

Irving banged up the receiver once more.

The hand that picked up his coffee cup trembled so that the amber liquid splashed into the saucer.

"Wrong number again?" inquired Bessie, opening Ruthie's door.

"Same feller," replied Irving, just as the ringing recommenced.

An outraged moment Irving hesitated. Then a crafty light came into his eyes, and lifting the receiver he answered in a low voice: "Hello."

"Hello. Would you please call Mrs. Fisch on the telephone?"

"Who?"

"Mrs. C. Fisch."

"Oh!" Irving's voice was all misleading softness.

"You want 2-1-5-6."

"No, I don't. I want—"

"That's the best place if you want sea fish. That's the King's Highway Fish Market."

Far from being out of humor now, Irving was all amiability. Not so the other fellow.

"Is this Apfels?" he bellowed.

"Apples? Oh! Why didn't you say so right away? If you want apples I could recommend you Malkin's Veg'table Store; 2-2-2." And hanging up the receiver he actually did a little hop and skip on the hardwood floor. With genuine relish he responded to the next summons.

"Is this 2-1-3-2-J?"

"No."

"Well, Central says it is."

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"Well, then, it is. I wouldn't make a liar from a lady."

"Is that you, Mr. Apfel?"

"Sure. Is that you, Mr. Banana?"

Hearing Bessie in the hall he reluctantly discontinued this scintillating barrage of wit. There was another ring.

"I wouldn't answer it," advised Bessie, coming downstairs with Ruthie all slicked up for school.

A wicked smile illumined Irving's countenance. "You're right. Leave them ring. After a while, when they had enough, they'll stop."

As a prophet Irving was a great success. After a while when they had enough they did stop.

"Where would you like to go to-night, kid?" he asked when Bessie met him at Oppers for supper.

Bessie wondered what could have induced this reckless mood. She did not know how the recollection of scintillant bits of the morning's repartee coming to him at odd moments had kept his spirits soaring all day. Maybe he was rotten, huh? Maybe you could impose on him, what? A coupla more times the same treatments and maybe after a while Mrs. Fisch puts in her own telephone. How mad that feller got! He had to chuckle every time he thought of it. The only hard luck was he had no one to tell such a joke to. Even Bessie wasn't just the right one.

"Let's go to the opera." Bessie smiled at him across the table. "Caruso's singing to-night."

He gave her a quick look, but seeing no trace of

pernicious earnestness behind her jesting he replied in kind:

"Sure, kid, we'll take a box. By the way, what's the matter with your friend Mrs. Fisch? I thought her brother the fluter was going to give her tickets for the opera and she was going to take us sometimes?"

"Oh, she will."

"Sure! You believe everybody. She only says that so she could use our telephone!"

Bessie frowned. "I admit it's a nuisance having to call her to the phone. I almost wish I knew of a way to stop it."

For some unaccountable reason her husband suddenly began to laugh.

When he came home the next night, Bessie was waiting for him at the door.

"You see, Irving"—she could scarcely wait to kiss him to tell him the good news—"Mrs. Fisch wasn't bluffing about those opera tickets!"

"What do you mean—she really is going to take us?"

"Well, she would have, only yesterday morning when her brother phoned to offer her tickets for last night—well, you know how rotten the telephone service is nowadays? Well, a couple of times he got a wrong number and then one of those idiots that like to kid over the telephone got on his line—one of the boys from the vegetable market or somebody—and began to— Why, Irving, what are you doing?"

"Doing? Me? What should I be doing?"

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"Why you threw your foot backward so hard I thought you were trying to kick yourself."

"Listen! Can't a man even have his foot go to sleep and try to wake it up without his wife right away thinking he's kicking himself? Kicking myself! Such a idea!"

Bessie thought him unnecessarily snippy, but then, you can't tell what a man's been through to irritate him, and it doesn't pay to be too particular.

The only thing Sophie Garlic ever did that met with Irving's entire approval was when she moved away from Flatbush. The fact that she named her first-born after him didn't make her cousin love her any more. To have your relations name after you such a loafer like Oivy Garlic is *osser* a compliment.

"And you had to begin with such people again," he grumbled. "Such spongers—such—"

Bessie spoke through a mouthful of invisibles with which she was pinning on her net.

"They're your family, dearie."

"You don't need to get personal, darling," replied Irving, selecting a tie. "I was only inquiring what you needed to begin with her again?"

"I didn't begin. Sophie phoned and asked if we were going to be home Sunday."

"And you had to say right away yes."

"Well, if I said no, they'd make it next Sunday. You know how Sophie is."

"Do I know? And I suppose she's gonna bring along that wild Indian—that street loafer—that—"

"Irvy? Of course. What else can she do with him?"

"Believe me, I could advise her. That *fresser*. Remember the last time how he et up the whole box of *matzoth* cookies my mother sent over extra for me? Sure. Laugh. By you it's nothing. Everyone could walk on you!"

"I can't help laughing. You got so mad. But cheer up, there are no *matzoth* cookies in the house."

"Never mind, he'll find something else. He's the worst I ever seen. Remember what he done to the piano bench with the driller? And the hall paper? Don't invite them overnight."

"Heaven forbid! I couldn't stand him more than a day myself. And poor Ruthie—"

Irving's face grew purple. "If he lays a finger on that child I—"

Bessie patted his arm soothingly. "Maybe he's not as bad as he used to be."

"Sure." Her husband pinched her under the chin to convey that he did not hold her entirely responsible. "Sure, maybe he's worse."

And he was right. If Oivy at five was the worst child Irving had ever seen it was only because he had never been privileged to behold Oivy at six. And you think the parents bothered their heads about him? *Yo!* Otto Garlic, the fat, was incased in a lethargy which nothing but the sight of food seemed to penetrate. And Sophie Garlic, the terror of the family, could never bring herself to say anything more scathing to her young hopeful than "Oivy dolling!" in re-

sponse to which he was apt to consign her to a place to which nice little boys do not usually consign their parents—at least not out loud.

Dinner was a howling success—if you put the accent on the adjective. The only way Irving, at the head of the table, could eat at all was by turning halfway round in his chair so his eyes could not behold the depravity beside him. But nothing could keep his ears from hearing the lusty and almost continuous serenade Oivy's feet beat against the mahogany table.

"Sophie!" he had to plead once or twice. "Please! Tell the boy he shouldn't knock with his feet on the table. It makes a mark."

Whereupon Sophie, with a look which did not conceal her opinion of people who thought more of mahogany tables than of little boys, would deliver her futile "Oivy dolling!" and all went merrily as before.

Irving began to fray all along his nerves. And when a forkful of spinach plus hard-boiled egg so far failed of its original destination as to land on the Chinese blue rug, even Bessie was shaken somewhat from her position of perfect hostess and uttered an aggrieved "Oh!"

As for Annie, from the moment the contents of a tilted soup plate profaned the virgin whiteness of her clean cloth and centerpiece she had never been the same. Only Otto Garlic, napkin under chin, continued placidly to consume food, unmoved by the atmospheric disturbances about him.

It was Ruthie, however, who suffered most. Her instinct, inheritance, training—her most sacred feel-

ings and traditions were outraged. Her mutely questioning eyes traveled continually from the persistently averted glance of her mother to the breath-destroying spectacle opposite, and so great was her horror that she almost forgot to eat her ice cream.

"Mamma!" was wrung at length from her well-ordered, six-year-old little soul when the prodigy picked up his almost empty plate and, applying it like a plaster to his face, proceeded to eradicate the final traces of ice cream. "Mamma! Ain't he a goop!"

The pent-up suffering in Irving exploded. "Ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! Haw—"

"Ruthie! Irving!" began Bessie, but the young iconoclast needed none of her championing.

"I ain't a goop, you ——" he retorted, at the same time propelling his now superfluous plate in the direction of his youthful critic.

It was only after the two youngsters had been sent upstairs to play that apparent harmony was restored with the coffee. And even then it was not so apparent as to be palpable. Sophie Garlic still bore on her face traces of her opinion of a cousin who could be so rough and shake a little feller that was only mischeevous, but didn't have a bad bone in his body. Irving, still ravaged by the rage in which he had risen to the defense of his own, sulked at the recollection of how he had been called off before he had shaken more than half the life out of that young loafer that smashed one of the best ice-cream plates and nilly—very nilly, mind you—did so on the countenance of Irving's only child! Even Bessie's fingers itched with

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the desire to shake somebody, were it only her own husband for being such a boor! Only Otto Garlic, raising his watery eyes one moment to the carnage, found no difficulty in regaining his accustomed poise, and you could hear how he really enjoyed his third cup of coffee after he had poured it into his saucer.

However, it has often been stated with undeniable logic and truth that all things come to an end in this world, and so did dinner and the afternoon and even the supper, less hectic but quite as uncomfortable as dinner, with Ruthie tearful and Oivy truculent, and everyone's nerves on edge—that is, everyone who had nerves—and the ghosts of the dinner's unpleasantness hovering in the air. Right after supper Bessie propelled in the direction of her room her outraged daughter, smarting for the first time in her young career under contact with the injustice of a world wherein so much wickedness could go unscathed—a world wherein the good and pure were sent to bed at seven o'clock while monsters of evil who called out bad names and broke dishes and kicked with their feet and hit their mothers back were permitted to stay up, apparently, ad lib.

At last the Garlics decided to go, and Bessie called Irving, who had disappeared upstairs. Otto opened the front door.

"It's raining," he remarked, making a discovery which Irving had made somewhat earlier. Sophie pushed Otto aside as though his opinion were utterly worthless on so weighty and subtle a matter.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "so it is! You'll have to loan me an umbrella, Bessie."

Bessie glanced at her husband, who remained strangely passive.

"Of course we'll let you have an umbrella."

"I don't think," casually remarked Irving, absorbed in the intricate problem of blowing air through a faulty pipestem, "that we got a umbrella in the house."

"Not—"

"No. You see"—he turned confidentially to his guests—"she's always loaning them away, and you know how it is with umbrellas."

"But, Irving—"

By that time Bessie had opened the closet. Diogenes himself would not have undertaken to find an umbrella in Apfel's hall closet!

Bessie, her head a mortified red, sent her husband a long look, which he, unfortunately, failed to receive because of his great preoccupation with his pipe.

He did not deem it necessary, furthermore, to reply to her next remark, to the effect that she could have sworn she put three umbrellas in that closet. But Mrs. Garlic vouchsafed bitterly that her hat would be ruined without an umbrella.

"Irving!" Irving with a look of unimpeachable innocence met her gaze: "Look upstairs and see if you can't find an umbrella anywhere."

"There's none here," he called down later in a voice which fairly vibrated with distress.

A few moments passed and then he heard the front door bang. A weak, shuddering sigh escaped him.

"Bessie!" He couldn't wait to come downstairs. "Bessie!" he called. "You'll die laughing when you hear how I fooled them son of a guns—"

There was a moment's heavy silence. Then: "Come down and tell us all," said Bessie evenly. "The folks are staying overnight."

Irving stood there—turned to stone—the ghastly mask of a laugh frozen on his features. At last, still in a daze, he descended the stairs.

"Fooled who?" inquired Sophie Garlic.

Heaven knows what he would have said if not for his Bessie!

"You mean the time you fooled the Marian Feather Company? You told me about that this morning."

"Oh!" said Irving.

"Oh!" said Sophie.

"I'll tell the folks, while you go next door and ask the Yittelmans if you can use their spare room. The folks are going to sleep in our bed."

Still somewhat dazed, he started to do her bidding. A need for steadying himself made him pause in the kitchen.

"Hate to put you out," he heard Otto say.

"Well, we couldn't very well go home in the rain." From Sophie.

"You're not putting us out," Bessie replied. "Irving doesn't mind asking the Yittelmans. We always exchange favors with the neighbors."

Irving did not go to the Yittelmans'.

After having prepared for herself the narrow couch

in the card room Bessie came downstairs in her kimono and slippers and tried to reason with him:

"Why don't you go and sleep at Yittelman's, dear?"

"I don't want to. I rather sleep here. This couch is very comf'table."

"But you'll get all cramped. It's too short for you."

"Well, I got to get used to a little inconvenience if I got a wife that invites spongers to stay overnight in my bed."

"I didn't invite them, darling. Sophie managed to invite herself. But why are you so obstinate? Mrs. Yittelman won't mind doing us a favor."

"No! I don't want no favors."

"Oh!" said Bessie suddenly; and she started to add something, but thought better of it and refrained.

In spite of his avowal that the couch was very comf'table Irving found it rather difficult to find a position that would accommodate his legs and at the same time do justice to his neck. He began to ponder whether, after all, it wouldn't have been better to have loaned them an umbrella, and considered it the price of getting rid of them. And cheap at the price. Why, what they'd eat for breakfast alone was worth the cost of an umbrella, especially the busted cotton one he loaned from his mother's once. Why didn't he think of that busted cotton one of his mother's?

But no—what's right is right. It's the principle of the thing! He was glad he had not been weak enough to ask the Yittelmans the favor of a bed. Rather stick

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to his principles even if his neck wasn't exactly so comfortable.

At last he fell asleep. So right away Tootsie (who some way had found out it was he who had refused her the milk) comes and grabs his right leg in her teeth, and she don't want to let go at all. And while he has his hands—not to mention his right leg—full with her, who should come along but young Oivy, and commences to call him names and at the same time begins to *klopp* him in the neck with a busted cotton umbrella that he found.

Irving awoke. His right leg was in genuine pain and his neck was very stiff. But it was not that which caused his heart to contract and a feeling of nausea to creep like an insidious wave over his entire body. No. It was a terrible thought, driving like a knife into the farthest tortured recesses of his soul—a thought the taste of which was as gall and wormwood on his tongue. The thought that if the Garlics should—and he could see no reason why they shouldn't—by chance happen to move the pillows of their bed they could not fail to be edified by the spectacle that would greet their eyes. For bungler, idiot, *schlemiehl* that he was, he had forgotten, *z'allen schlemazel*, to remove certain things which in a moment of inspiration he had placed under those pillows for safekeeping. Certain things which the Garlics, unless they were suddenly stricken with total blindness and malignant amnesia, could not fail to recognize as umbrellas—two silk and one busted cotton. The three umbrellas, in short, that Bessie could have sworn she had put in the hall closet!

Is it a wonder Irving couldn't sleep so very well that night?

In April, all means of checking Ruthie's cough having failed, Doctor Stone recommended a change of air. So Irving had to commute to Myrtle Arbor, a farm owned by some friends out in Jersey. The reason the Danzigers had named their farm Moitle Harbor was probably because there was no sign of either myrtle or arbor on the place—on the same principle as those riddles wherein something always barks like a dog to make it harder to guess.

One Sunday afternoon the Yittelmans drove up in their car with Tootsie. Irving could *grad* have lived without them, but if it made Ruthie happy, *schon, schon*, let them come. Even Tootsie. Ruthie certainly had a *gedille* with Tootsie. She didn't want to let them take her away at all. She wanted them to leave her up there. Did you ever hear such a nonsense? Irving was reasoning with her out on the porch, when Bessie joined him.

"Irving"—she spoke under her breath—"it's blowing up cold. Don't you want to lend Mr. Yittelman your gray sweater?"

"What? My new gray sweater that I just got?"

"It's the only one we have to offer him."

"And you know why."

"It's not Mr. Yittelman's fault that your brother Miltie took the red one on his vacation and lost it."

"I suppose it's mine? No, Bessie, you know my feelings about this."

"He might get pneumonia."

Irving had no chance to reply, for at that moment Mr. Yittelman appeared.

"Well," said that gentleman, his benignant smile breaking through his stubby gray beard, "off we go. Thank you for a pleasant day and I wish Ruthie soon better—she don't look so good to-day. Here, Toots!" he called, raising his voice. And Tootsie obediently left Ruthie's side and waddled over.

Ruthie's eyes, a trifle heavy all day, grew dangerously moist.

"Let Tootsie stay. Please! Don't take Tootsie away."

"Oh, Ruthie!" Bessie's voice had the proper reproachful inflection. "Tootsie has to go home."

Irving chimed in. "Mrs. Yittelman will bring her again sometime."

"Sure," agreed Mrs. Yittelman. "I bring her again sometime."

"I don't want her sometime. I want her now."

"But, darling!" Bessie was the mortified parent. "You couldn't take Tootsie to bed with you, could you?"

"But I could play with her to-morrow."

"To-morrow they'll bring her again. Won't you, Mrs. Yittelman?"

And Irving bore her, tearful and protesting, to bed. Bessie waited to see their guests off. Returning to the room later, she found him seated in an old rocker, rocking as though history depended on the number of oscillations he achieved, and singing in a voice

which barely rose above the complaining monotone of the rocker a nameless croon unhampered by either words or melody.

"Bzhummm," it sounded like—"zhumm—zhumm." And the tune was as free from meaning as the words. But Ruthie had doubtless found in it both significance and charm. For her eyes, still shadowed by recent tears, were closed in contented slumber, and her flushed little face, silhouetted against his dark vest, had relaxed, with the exception of occasional quivering half sobs, into serene repose. From the quilt which enfolded her a little bare pink foot had escaped, and a little bare tan arm had slid confidently from his neck to his chest. Irving's head was bent forward so that his droning "Bzhummm—zhumm—zhumm" came muffled through the filter of her curls.

At the sound of Bessie's footsteps he looked up and she caught before it vanished from his eyes the light that had been kindled there by the warm, relaxed little burden in his arms. Most mothers and some fathers have at some time been transfigured by that look of exalted happiness shadowed by the brooding ghost of some nameless, unreasoning, unfathomable dread.

Closing the door softly, Bessie leaned for a moment against it, her own eyes luminous with something which welled over from a suffocating fullness in the region of her heart.

The next morning when Irving, considerably worried, left for his office Ruthie had developed a fever, and he admonished Bessie she "should be sure and have the doctor in."

All day he kept thinking about her and he took an early train for Myrtle Arbor. Ruthie was in bed. At sight of him she brightened.

"Where's Tootsie?" she inquired when he bent to kiss her.

Bessie signaled him into the next room. "She's been calling for Tootsie all day," she explained. "You know you told her Yittelmans would bring her back again to-day."

"Oh, for heaven's sake! What can we do?"

"What *can* we do?" demanded Bessie practically.

"Did you have in the doctor?"

"Yes. Doctor Brown. But he couldn't seem to find anything the matter."

"*Auch mir* a doctor!"

"He gave her something and said if that didn't help we'd have to wait until something showed up."

"We need a doctor for that? If she ain't better to-morrow we have Stone out."

"Will he leave all his other patients?"

"If Ruthie's sick?" Irving had to laugh at the idea that a doctor wouldn't leave everything if his Ruthie was sick.

"I think it's just something she ate. You know how easily—"

At that moment Ruthie called, and Irving dashed into her room.

"Papa, why didn't you bring Tootsie?" Her eyes were filmed with tears.

"Papa didn't know, darling—"

"Mamma said you were going to bring Tootsie."

And the whole flock of tears spilled over and headed south. Irving was so distressed he had to leave the room.

The next afternoon Irving sat at his desk chewing on the end of a cigar. He was in a vile humor. He had just phoned Bessie, who told him the fever was going up again and the child was crying incessantly for Tootsie. And Doctor Brown had advised that they get Tootsie. He had phoned Doctor Stone, whom he had always considered not alone a good doctor but a friend, too, but who had shown himself—well, Irving was through with him, that's all. He couldn't see his way clear to leave all his patients and go up to Myrtle Arbor to-day. However, if the child was no better in the morning Irving should phone him again. In the meanwhile, if she was grieving over the absence of a playmate it seemed to him a very simple matter to remove the cause of grief by procuring the playmate.

Yeh. Very simple! Irving threw away the end of the cigar. Sure! A cinch! He should go to Yittelmans and loan their dog that was like a only child, when he wouldn't even loan them his sweater, they shouldn't catch a pneumonia.

"Wenn lacht Gott?" he pondered bitterly. It had to be *grad* that dog, too, that he wouldn't give a cup of milk to, one Sunday evening, he remembered. And he remembered, too, that the dog cried half the night till the milkman came. And now his child was crying for that dog.

A horrible sensation manifested itself inside his vest.

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And curious chills went sneaking down his spine.

Such a luck he had! Why couldn't his child be crying for something he could get without going to Yittelmans—something he could buy? He wouldn't stand on a dollar, you bet, if it was only something he could buy. But a dog that you—

A sudden golden ray of hope pierced the shroud of his thoughts. Why not? Why couldn't you buy a dog?

The more he thought of it the better it appealed to him. A dog of her own for Ruthie instead of a loaned one! Why, the child would be tickled to death! A real dog instead of a *stück machshoufes* like Tootsie. And he could be independent from them Yittelmans! I tell you, a *chochem* you had to be!

He slapped on his hat and headed for Fifth Avenue. He had often passed an animal store there. It should cost him something. He should worry.

In spite of his own indifference to the species he felt a real thrill at the prospect of the dog he was about to purchase. To-night when he would come home and Ruthie would turn her big brown eyes to him and ask him: "Papa, did you bring along Tootsie?" he would answer her: "Yo! Tootsie! Do I want to insult my darling? Look what papa brought you—a real dog!"

And to-morrow she would be better! And then they could give away the dog. Or maybe they wouldn't need to give it away? Maybe they could sell it for a little less? Why not? Wouldn't people

be glad to buy such a dog for a little less? Though, on the other hand, why should he take less? What's to get second-handed on such a dog if you use him a little? To tell the truth, you don't even use him. The child plays with him and he has it good. Maybe if he has it good—fresh air and good food like by Danzigers—no dog store could give such food like by Danzigers—maybe he gets worth more. It's like any other investment—such a animal. You got to figger original investment, depreciation and upkeep. How much could Danzigers charge for feeding such a dog? What does such a dog eat? A coupla bones and some garbage maybe? Maybe Danzigers wouldn't charge nothing and the transaction would even show a profit.

He had now reached Fifth Avenue and paused, uncertain whether to turn up or down. He tried to remember. It was a swell store—on a corner. Lord knows what they soak you in such a store on Fifth Avenue! They got to make their rent! But with dogs there's no styles or no seasons or nothing. A dog is a dog. Downtown he could probably get one for half.

But where should he go looking round downtown for such a dog? He could walk his feet off. Dog stores ain't sitting on every corner waiting for once your child should begin hollering for a dog.

He stopped and consulted a Red Book. He found no dog stores, but plenty of Dog Kennels and Breeders of Fancy Toy Dogs. A kennel he wouldn't need. The dog could sleep in Danzigers' barn. And such a fancy dog he didn't need neither. A plain one would do.

Guided by the Red Book he located a place near Third Avenue. Such a place near Third Avenue, he figured, couldn't be so *gefährlich* fancy.

It was a small store with an assortment of fluffy white dogs in the window in varying stages of ambition, ranging from complete somnolence to the most exaggerated vivacity.

Long after the last reverberations of the din precipitated by the opening of the door had died away, a leisurely, sandy-looking individual appeared from behind the partition marked Private.

"I want such a dog," announced Irving.

"What kind of a dog?" inquired the man, just as if Irving was some kind of a drummer or something instead of a customer.

"It's got to match one that belongs to some friends of ours. It's such a white animal with black spots. A fox terrier!" he achieved by a terrific feat of memory. "Something cheap," he hastened to add as the man disappeared behind the partition. "It's only to play with."

The man reappeared with the kind of animal kind-hearted little boys are always bringing home on muddy days for mamma to adopt just when mamma has had the rugs cleaned for the holidays. His skin was a quasi-white with a few black and a few brown spots. Even Irving's unskilled eye noted certain architectural defects. Tootsie, for instance, was built much closer to the ground. And the prospective purchase was very blunt as to nose and long as to ears.

"Is that a fox terrier?" inquired Irving.

The man scratched his head. "Well, he's more a fox terrier than anything else."

"I bet," suggested Irving ironically, "his name is Beauty."

"Nope; Prince," replied the man. "But you can call him Beauty if you like. He's seven dollars."

"Do I pay you the seven dollars or do you pay me?"

The man didn't even know enough to laugh at a customer's jokes! You wonder how such fellers could make a living. Such salesmanship! And such a stock!

"He ain't much to look at, but he's got a nice disposition," said the man. You'd never think he was trying to sell something.

"He's got to have more than that before I give you seven dollars," said Irving.

"That's the only fox terrier I have just now."

He didn't even think to show him something else! Irving had to think of that himself. It occurred to him suddenly. *Wie heisst* he must get a fox terrier? Was Tootsie such a picture and did he love her so much that he should lay out good money to have her *mischpoche* snapping round his feet? And such a *mischpoche*! He looked at the dog he might call Beauty. No! "I wouldn't take him *geschenkt*," he announced.

The man stood there as though he should worry if he made a sale or not. It was Irving who had to ask, nodding in the direction of the window, "How much is such a little feller?"

The man reached over and picked up a little ball of fluff and held him aloft. "Cute, ain't he?"

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"Well," responded Irving, who wasn't such a fool as to praise goods he intended to buy, "there ain't much to him. But how much you want for him? The big feller I wouldn't take at no price."

"Two hundred dollars," replied the man, just as if he was in his right mind.

Irving walked out of the store leading by a string a quasi-white dog with brown and black spots, whom he might call Beauty. Æsthetically he was, perhaps, deficient, but he had a lovely disposition, and that was the main thing in a dog that you were only getting for a child to play with. They weren't going to make style with him. And anybody that could go crazy over Tootsie, anything was good enough for.

Irving never in his life had taken a dog out on a leash. He became suddenly aware of the extraordinarily large number of lamp posts with which the streets of New York are lighted. It occurred to him that his dog was taking advantage of his lack of experience.

Angrily he pulled at the cord. The dog sat down and commenced to skid.

Irving made another observation about New York. The people are terribly nosy! And the nosiest ones live round Third Avenue. Whoever knew there were such a lot of people round Third Avenue? A million people at least, and not one could mind their own business! They looked at him as if he had *eppes* a little rhinoceros on a string. What was so funny about a man taking out on a string a brand-new dog that he just laid out seven dollars for?

He glanced down at the dog. The cord had tightened about his neck and he seemed in a fair way to end his earthly miseries. Irving had a momentary vicious hope that he would—then and there. If the *hund* rather choke than move his legs—but then he remembered his seven dollars, so he stopped tugging and permitted the dog to set the pace. For the sake of the passers-by who couldn't mind their own business he made it appear that he was only out for the air and did not care how long he took to get it. But in his heart, if he wasn't crazy about dogs before, you can imagine how he began now to get in love with them animals!

And by the time he reached Myrtle Arbor! It is no pleasure to ride from New York to Myrtle Arbor in a baggage car, I can tell you! Especially before the warm weather sets in. And Irving, who had never even suspected the railroad regulations concerning dogs and passenger trains, could tell you too! But how could he leave the dog alone in the baggage car where them big loafers would liable drop a trunk on him? You know how gentle them fellers handle your baggage! So what would they do to a dog that he just paid seven dollars for and made a damn fool out of himself dragging for twenty blocks on a string because the conductor of a Third Avenue car wouldn't let him get on with it and he wouldn't give the *hund* the satisfaction to take a taxi.

But after he laid out his good money and *schlepped* such a ki-yi all the way out to Myrtle Arbor, Ruthie wouldn't even look at it.

"I want Tootsie!" she insisted.

It was as though she had been crying for her mother and somebody had offered her a nice new lady she had never seen before.

And she seemed very sick. Irving stood beside her bed, and there were times when she did not know him. Her little cheeks were very red and her little arms flinging about restlessly tossed off the covers quicker than Bessie could put them on. The doctor had said not to worry. Some children ran up a very high fever on a slight attack of intestinal absorption. He could not find anything else the matter. When they got the poison out of her system she would be better.

Meanwhile Irving tied the dog to a post outside the farmhouse, where he bawled until about three A. M. Then he ceased suddenly, for a reason which Irving discovered later in the morning. For a fragment of frayed rope tied to a post outside the farmhouse was all that remained to Irving Apfel of the dog that he might have called Beauty!

All day Irving couldn't put his mind on his work. His head throbbed from loss of sleep and worry.

He could think of nothing but Ruthie, tossing on a bed of fever, and calling "Tootsie! Tootsie!"

Again he got Doctor Stone on the wire. He could not get away that day either. But to-morrow, if there was no improvement—

To-morrow! What couldn't happen till to-morrow?

And in the meanwhile she was lying there—his baby—his little Ruthie—and calling—calling.

And he, her own father, who pretended to love her more than a piece of his own heart—he wouldn't raise a finger to get for her the one thing in the world she wanted; maybe the one thing in the world that would make her better!

He didn't deserve to have such a rose—such a goldfish—such an angel! He was a dog—a spite-face—a slaughterer!

In an agony of self-loathing he called up Yittelman.

"What do you know! Such an attachment the child has for our Tootsie! Sure you could have a loan of her! I'll go home and bring her in to your office."

Almost there were tears in Irving's eyes. "How could I put you to so much trouble, Mr. Yittelman!"

"Don't say a word about it, Apfel. For a friend nothing is too much trouble. Like what they say—to give is more a blessing than to get. I'll bring her in."

Not only did he bring her in to Irving but he drove all the way up to Myrtle Arbor in his car. Which is better than sitting in a baggage car, with Tootsie trying to make a meal off your ankles—I tell you!

Later when Ruthie, who that afternoon had taken a decided turn for the better, had fallen asleep with Tootsie in her arms and a happy smile on her face, Irving saw Yittelman to the garage where he had left his car.

"Say, Yittelman," said Irving, "I don't how to begin to thank you for what you done to-day."

"Tush!" said Yittelman. "It's nothing."

"It was such a favor—"

"I'm glad you think so, Apfel. I like to do somebody a favor. It's like what they say—throwing a piece bread on the water. You don't know what day it comes back to you when you're hungry. Maybe you couldn't see it at the time how it's going to do you good—but my motto is 'Bread casted in water turns around again and comes back.'"

Irving shifted to the other foot uncomfortably.

"You never know," continued Mr. Yittelman, getting into his car, "when you could need people. Even such a dog."

"Ain't it the truth?" said Irving humbly. "By the way, Yittelman, wouldn't you be cold going home? Couldn't I loan you something—a sweater maybe?"

"Oh—I'm glad you reminded me. You should talk to me about thanks yet! If not for you I maybe, God forbid, had pneumonia by now. I was only saying to Mrs. Yittelman on the way home Sunday, 'Mamma,' I was saying, 'there's nothing I wouldn't do for that Mrs. Apfel!' Of course you too, Apfel. But your wife, she should keep in good health; in the whole neighborhood there's nobody like her. I couldn't get over her, with all she had on her mind Sunday and how she was nervous with Ruthie and all, she thinks about me yet, I shouldn't get, God forbid, a pneumonia!

"Put your hand please in the sidepocket there in the back. I'm really ashamed I forgot to return it after I promised I'll send it right away back, possels post. But, so long you didn't miss it, no harm done. A

thousand thanks for the loan, Apfel. If not for that sweater I maybe wouldn't be driving out here to-day with Tootseleh, heh, Apfel?"

Irving, deep in thought, regarded his new gray sweater. Mr. Yittelman threw in his clutch.

"Well, so long, Apfel. I got a long ride home."

"So long, and again thanks for the dog."

"Don't mention it. I'm only sorry she ain't more friends with you, Apfel—our Tootseleh. I know you ain't on such good terms with her teeth! But you know how they say, 'A gifted dog you shouldn't look in the mouth!' Heh, Apfel? So long!"

EIGHT: O TEMPORA! O MAWRUSS!

"GOD," observed Neil Wolfe to his friend, Irving Apfel, in whose office they were seated, "loves the British, but he certainly gives the Jews the luck."

Irving selected one of two cigars his friend proffered him and tilted back his chair so that his six feet of broad-shouldered manhood made a perilous triangle with his desk and the floor. His square chin showed a late afternoon shadowing of blue, and his shiny black hair, wetly plastered back in wide, sleek ridges from his square forehead, suggested recent thought waves in the direction of home. But it was only five-forty-five, and an unwritten law among men forbade their leaving the office for another fifteen minutes.

Neil Wolfe was half a foot shorter than his friend—blond, dynamic, forceful, with a magnificent bass voice and a sense of humor. He teased Irving as unmercifully as he bullied him, but Irving adored him.

"I don't know," Irving replied. "I think it's more smartness than luck."

"Don't tell me, you big lucky stiff! My Uncle Abraham is smarter than any Jew I ever met—even you. But he just hasn't got your luck."

"Luck? Luck? I don't believe in it! Your Uncle Abraham is a *risches ponem* and that's why things don't go right with him."

"I don't know what a *risches ponem* is, but it sounds bad, so I guess Uncle is it."

He was. If Abraham Wolfe could have taken this sorry scheme entire and molded it closer to the heart's desire, there would have been in the recasting no Jewish charitable institutions. For one thing there would have been no one to support them. For another, there would have been no one to need them. No, Mr. Wolfe could never quite understand why the good Lord, having created the Church of England, had not called it a day and quit then and there.


And the worst of it is, if you happen to be born a Wolfe, though you spell it with never so many silent e's, and if in addition to Wolfe your parents have had the rummy notion to christen you Abraham, not all the baptismal water in England will wash away the suspicion that you are a true descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, don't you know. Especially if God has seen fit to grace your countenance with a goodly allowance of British nose. And if the more you resent it the more the thing seems to stick to you, you get rather fed up on it after a while, what?

Abraham Wolfe and his brother Charles had for many years owned homes in King's Highway, a section of Brooklyn which had suddenly become so infested with kosher delicatessen stores that all the God-fearing Christians had to sell their homes—at a profit—and move elsewhere. But not Abraham Wolfe. He had a gymnasium rigged up in his attic. He had a vegetable garden at the back of his house, and to the

left a concrete pathway led to the garage which his brother Charles had erected on their joint properties. His wife had a complete electric equipment, which Mr. Wolfe had solicitously installed for her at the expense of sundry manufacturers eager to have him recommend their wares. He would not consider moving away. He remained. So did a slight tendency toward acidity, which his doctor had hoped to cure only through the absence of all nervous excitement and annoyance.

About three months after the death of Charles, Mr. Wolfe's nephew Neil wrote to him—at his mountain hotel—that he had an offer for Charles' house from his best friend. However, as he had promised to give his Uncle Abraham first say, did his uncle wish to purchase the house for nine thousand dollars? No, his uncle jolly well did not. Nine thousand dollars was too dashed much money. Besides, if the people were friends of Neil, don't you see—why, there was no blooming sense in his buying it at all, what?

Mr. Wolfe returned to find Irving Apfel et al. installed next door. His acidity fairly waxed fat, figuratively speaking, on his mental anguish. And when almost immediately thereafter prices began to boom in King's Highway, so that the house became worth double what Mr. Apfel had paid for it—and if Mr. Wolfe had bought it his bank balance would have been burdened with about nine thousand unearned dollars—he simply could not keep his mind from dwelling on his misfortunes, and he became so impregnated



with acid that he had to drink his milk through a straw to keep it from curdling—really!

Irving had fitted up half the garage, which they shared jointly, as a playhouse for little Ruthie, aged six. Mr. Wolfe had no use for his half. You see, he was Ruthless. Such was the pervasiveness of his acidity that an idea up in his brain began to ferment. In the end he bought a second-hand car. Irving was stunned by the news.

"What do you mean—a regular automobile? That piker? How do you know?" he demanded of his wife.

Bessie, a small armful of slim womanhood in a bungalow apron which entirely covered her dark blue dress, had seen him drive it into the garage. Her hair fluffed softly round her flushed little face, and in her eyes was a helpless sort of light, as though salad dressing were her soul's despair. As a matter of fact, at making salad dressing, as at everything else her capable little hands undertook, she was invariably successful. Her expression—wistful, appealing, almost despairing—had nothing to do with the matter in hand, but was altogether a racial characteristic. You may have noticed it. It is very seductive and very misleading.

"He needs a car," commented her husband, "like I need a hole in the back of my head to let out the steam. For what does he need a car?"

"For enjoyment probably" suggested Bessie, puckering up her little mouth wryly at the taste of the salad dressing.

"Enjoyment! Him? He don't enjoy nothing only to see somebody fall down on a banana peel and break their necks. It's dangerous to leave him walk round the streets—the kind of enjoyment he's looking for! I don't wish him no hard luck, only I hope he runs into a telegraph pole the first day. What kind of a car has he got?"

"I didn't notice. But you can run out and look while I—"

"Yo! He should live so long! What do I care about cars anyway? I rather hire a taxi when I need it. Let somebody else get the headaches. I should go look what kind of a car he's got! Yo!"

However, a few minutes later, just when he happened to be examining the paint on the side of his house, Mr. Wolfe, with an air of casualness which ill concealed his low-minded exultation, came rolling out of the garage and drove away.

"I should walk," muttered Irving, heading for his back door and forgetting all about the paint, "while such a nothing rides round in a Fearless. D'y'ever see?"

To Bessie he announced inspiredly out of a silence which had enveloped him throughout almost the whole of dinner: "I know why he done it!" He nodded his head knowingly. "He thinks we wouldn't leave Ruthie play in the garadge no more! That's why he got it! I knew it wasn't only for pleasure. How I hate such a spite face! All he thinks about is spite—spite! But wait! I'll show him!"

Bessie raised questioning eyebrows from the com-

plicated problem of disposing of a chicken wing with equal regard for good breeding and efficiency.

"I got a good mind to buy one twice as big—he should *plots* with aggravation!"

Bessie betrayed a certain amount of interest.

"You mean you're thinking of buying a—"

Irving interrupted her hastily:

"Sure! Right away I'll run out and buy a car! I was only thinking, if I'll buy a car, so I'll buy one it'll take up twice the room in the garadge—he should bust his gall. Only I ain't thinking about it yet."

And neither was he—consciously. But you know how it is, once the deadly germ has gained admission to your subconscious storeroom. How futile the anti-toxins of prudence, caution, economy! How vain the preventive of previous good resolutions! You and I know that the best thing to do, once you have been bitten, is to go out and sign an application blank, thereby saving wear and tear on the gears and brakes of your willing centers. But Irving did not know.

He fell asleep that night as easily as if there did not exist such a thing as autosuggestion. Poor Irving—already as firmly hooked as though he had paid his deposit and the check had gone through and he couldn't even stop payment on it any more.

And in this untroubled slumber he dreamed that he came riding home in a big, new, magnificent automobile—so big, so new and withal so magnificent that beside it the car of Mr. Wolfe suggested something the ash man was carrying away the week after Christ-

mas. And Mr. Wolfe, beholding it, became green with rage and began to sneeze and cough and sputter.

Irving woke, thereby dissipating the dream. Not so the sneezing, coughing and sputtering. They belonged, it developed, to Mr. Wolfe's car, which he, with noisy disregard for the slumbers of Mr. Apfel, was coaxing into the garage. It was eleven-thirty.

Irving's next dream was also of the car, only now it was late at night, and Mr. Wolfe, who had returned some time before, making a noise like goodness knows what, could be presumed to have entered his first delicious slumber. And now the car in which Irving rode was not only twice as big and three times as grand as Mr. Wolfe's, but it was at least ten times as noisy. This dream was even more soul satisfying than the first, probably because it took place within the full consciousness of the dreamer.

Well, as I said before, once you start thinking about automobiles, comes a day when such a feller nilly gives you a divorce from your heels, only instead of hurrying on like always, a-scared of your life, you stand still and even give him a shake with your fist, and "wait, you son of a gun!" or words to that effect, you mutter.

Comes another day when you're hanging on a strap making up your mind which you hate worse, *post-mortem* garlic or long since departed tobacco, and even the subway has to come up for air, and you can see such a bunch of nothings riding across the bridge in automobiles as if it was coming to them. And you shut your mouth tight, forgetting that you opened it on purpose

you shouldn't have to breathe through your nose, and something—something happens in your insides!

And then—well, you know how it is yourself when you come home early from the office and your wife is giving a hand in the kitchen and you got nothing to do only sit on the porch and read the evening papers which you already found out got nothing in; and there on the lawn next door is a feller taking apart his car from head to tail light, and—well—not that you change your opinions of course, only—

And one fine day you find that fellers with automobiles ain't really such a terrible bore like you used to think. Really, to hear them talk don't give you such a pain at all. Even, you ask them a few questions yourself. Asking don't cost nothing. You even get to figuring, if you ever did get a car—you know, if you ever got to the point where you had to have it for your business, what kind would you get? And though you know positively that you ain't in the least interested in buying a car, still you open a magazine at the back instead of the front—just for the reading. They really make them ads more interesting often than the stories nowadays. Honest!

And whereas before you never took any notice of a car unless it picked on you first, now you begin to read the names on the wheels of all the automobiles you pass parked along the curb. And you try to make out the name plates on those that are coming toward you without malicious intent. It got to be a sort of game with Irving to see how far away he could spot the makes he knew. Many a time he crossed a street

to verify a casual guess. Soon he began to be proud of the scope of his knowledge. It was this pride which—

Far be it from me to indulge in any bromidiocies in regard to pride. Only, one Sunday morning as Irving and Bessie were walking down to her mother's for dinner he began naming the cars as they passed. Of some he wasn't exactly so sure, y'understand, but Bessie wouldn't know the difference anyway. She didn't. But she wasn't altogether stupid. She regarded her husband with a little narrowing of the lids over her misleadingly helpless brown eyes. And when, upon arrival at her mother's house, Irving made himself comfortable with the automobile section of the paper the look in her eyes deepened, and she remarked something to her cousin, Arthur Jacobi, the lawyer—a tall, wavy-haired, handsome youth, the pride of the family.

"Why don't you buy a car, Irving?" asked Arthur at dinner. "A rich man like you—"

Irving started, his face dully red.

"A car? What do I need with a car?"

"You could come round Sundays and take Aunt Essie out for a ride."

"Yo!" Irving grunted. "If I made my money easy like you, maybe. But I ain't a lawyer. I got to work for my living."

"We don't want a car," supplemented Bessie, "until we can really afford one. I don't want to feel every time we puncture a tire—'there goes my winter suit!'"

"To hear you talk," put in Irving, "you would think I'd deduct it from your allowance if a tire busted."

And anyway if you get good tires they're guaranteed eight or ten thousand miles."

"Sure! I'm surprised at you, Bessie! Here's your husband dying to buy a car, and—"

"Who? Me?" Irving's indignation was enough to convict him. "I never even thought of such a thing!"

Isn't it a shame the way that automobile bug can make a liar out of an honest man? Why, just two nights before, watching Mr. Wolfe and his shadowy wife emerge half frozen from their open Fearless, Irving had lost himself with significant ease along a well-worn avenue of thought ending in a series of comparisons between the merits of open cars—even the most magnificent—and closed, even the more humble, which were all in favor of the latter. True, a sedan, for instance, wouldn't take up so much room in the garage as the car which had heretofore occupied that place in Irving's mental wanderings. But on the other hand, to see him come home nice and warm on such a night while Mr. Wolfe was perishing with the cold would be *krenk* enough for that gentleman. A big car was not such a bargain either, y'understand.

"First place," pondered Irving, "you got too much room in it. Your friends are all the time expecting you to take them along, and especial your wife's family. Not that you wouldn't take them along once in a while for a ride, but—you know how it is with people you take out in your car—they always got their pockets sewed up. And especially the women should ever think of shelling out a dollar, God forbid! Your

wife's mother, for instance. Not that she ain't a grand woman. But you don't need to see her every day for your happiness. Between you and I, for your happiness you wouldn't need to see her at all. Even, a cup-pay might be better than a sedan. If people weren't *grad* so comf'table they wouldn't come along all the time. And if Ruthie had to sit on the little seat every time Bessie wouldn't be so quick to invite along every Tom, Dick and Julius."

Yes, a coupé was the thing. Not that he was thinking about buying a car of course!

One day he noticed a shiny new padlock on the door of the garage.

"What's th' idea?" he demanded, bearding old man Wolfe on his back porch. "Trying to lock me outa the garadge? I own half that garadge!"

"I say don't get so dashed excited! I've got to protect my blooming property, what?"

"I don't know nothing about your blooming property. I only know you got no right absolootly to keep me outa my garadge."

"I say, don't be a bally ass! I'll let you in any time you like, you know. But my blasted insurance—"

"What I got to do with your blasted insurance? All I know is, you got no right positively to put a padlock on my property. Every time I want to go in my own garadge I should ask yet your permission? You should live so long!"

"I don't see what you're going to do about it—really."

He found out the following Sunday night, as with

a creaking of gears, a honking of horn and a screeching of brakes he arrived at his garage, and stepping out of his car began fumbling in his pocket for his keys. Suddenly his eye was caught by something on the door, and inspection having verified his worst suspicions, language began to issue from his lips, which, though perfectly good English, was by the same token decidedly more English than good.

As he reached the Apfel porch the door was opened noiselessly and the friendly voice of his neighbor assailed him:

"Did you want to get in the garadge, Mr. Wolfe?"

With biting sarcasm Mr. Wolfe responded: "You don't suppose I jolly well want to leave my blooming car in the street, what?"

"No," replied Mr. Apfel seriously. "I stayed up on purpose to leave you in, because I know what a inconvenience it is to be locked outa your own garadge."

"I say, look here now," began Mr. Wolfe, who had found that even the most biting sarcasm wasn't a dashed bit of good with the blooming rabble, "what's the dashed idea of having two blooming locks on the door?"

"To protect my property."

"Property! Why, dash it, you haven't any bally property!"

"I beg your pardon"—Mr. Apfel's manner was one of wounded dignity—"I got a belly stepladder and two belly cans of paint. And you know how expensive paint is nowadays!"

"But, dash it all, one lock is enough!" spluttered Mr. Wolfe.

Irving shook his head sadly.

"You might forget to lock it some time, and my insurance—"

Mr. Wolfe made a noise in his throat.

"See here, you know, that's all bally rot! How am I going to get in my blooming garage?"

"I'll leave you in any time you want—in our blooming garadge."

"But—but—but how am I going to get my blooming car if you're out?"

"The same way I'll get my blooming stepladder if you're out."

Too bad Mr. Wolfe could not at that moment have been put to the acid test. He would have sailed through on high.

"I say," he shouted furiously to his retreating neighbor, "that's all bally rot! I won't stand for it, dod rot it!"

"I don't see," replied Irving, "what you're going to do about it—dod rot it!" he flung over his shoulder as an afterthought.

Late the next night there was a violent peal at the Apfel bell. At least it would have been a violent peal had not Irving thoughtfully disconnected the bell wires. The speech Mr. Wolfe had prepared died on his lips. While he was readjusting his mental processes a window opened overhead.

"Anything I could do for you, Mr. Wolfe?"

"Yes. I suppose you wouldn't mind letting me into my garage, what?"

"—Th—th—" Mr. Apfel's manner registered deep concern. "Too bad you went to the trouble to come away over here. I left our blooming garadge unlocked especial to save you th' inconvenience—"

People without humor or imagination are usually at a disadvantage in affairs of this kind. Mr. Wolfe had rather a bad spell that night.

The following night it was quite cold and Mr. Wolfe retired early. Pressure brought to bear upon his front doorbell tore him from that sleep which comes to good and evil, history and literature to the contrary notwithstanding, and he was at the window nursing a stubbed toe before he even realized that he was awake. Borne on an icy blast, through the open window drifted the pleasant voice of Mr. Apfel:

"Sorry to disturb you so late, but would you mind opening for me the door to our blooming garadge? I need my blooming stepladder."

Though Mr. Wolfe failed to honor this perfectly reasonable request, and even slammed down the window rudely, Irving whistled himself home. Life has compensations even for a man who has to do without his blooming stepladder all night.

The next time Mr. Wolfe found the garage tightly locked a light snow was falling. Mr. Wolfe let himself softly into his house. He fumed a little until Central took his number. Then he relaxed. He could hear the ringing in the next house. In his mind he had composed a little speech for the ears of Mr. Apfel

—well, not exactly composed—adapted. It had been composed a few nights before by Mr. Apfel, who, desiring a can of paint at midnight and finding the Wolfe doorbell muffled, had had recourse to the telephone. And Mr. Wolfe, though he suspected blooming well who it might be, had nevertheless answered, because there always was the chance that it might blooming well not be. And besides when the dashed telephone is at your bedside it takes dashed strong nerves to withstand its appeal, what?

Lacking imagination, the very words his neighbor had used on that irritating occasion rolled sweetly in Mr. Wolfe's mind. Only, when prolonged ringing failed to elicit any response, they began to lose flavor, and impatience seized him.

At last the casual voice of Central advised him that they didn't answer, which, dash it all, was perfectly obvious, what? He bade her jolly well keep on ringing. Meanwhile the snow had covered his car with "ermine too dear for an earl." Mr. Wolfe was not familiar with the American poets, and it is doubtful whether he would have recalled Lowell just at that moment anyway.

After the languorous voice of Central had assured him for the fourth time that they did not answer, Mr. Wolfe stepped out into the night and tried the Apfel back doorbell. It too had been bereft of all power for good or evil. Whereupon a great rage possessed Mr. Wolfe and he shook both the front and the back doors—not at the same time, however—and banged with his fists and pounded with a shovel, until a voice

down the street bade him desist. Well, it amounted to that anyway. Though most of the words were in a blasted foreign idiom and sounded more like a man gargling a bad throat than any blooming language, Mr. Wolfe had no difficulty in gathering that it jolly well amounted to that.

So Mr. Wolfe, having removed some of the ermine from his car, covered it over with his wife's best couch cover and returned to the phone. Though he realized that he could not make them answer, still he had no intention of letting them sleep in peace. As Mr. Wolfe recalled, it is dashed difficult to sleep through a telephone barrage, what?

In the early morning Mr. Wolfe descended to see whether the blasted engine had frozen. It had. So had his wife's best couch cover, which he justly suspected she would nag him into replacing. He was in a bad humor, and what made it even worse was the fact that the garage key had laid in an envelope right outside his front door all night, only he had not discovered it until daybreak. And when he learned later that the Apfels had been absent all night visiting relatives in Staten Island it was not an absence which made the heart grow fonder.

Neil, trying to adjust matters, arranged a meeting. But he could bring the discussion no further than the point where Mr. Wolfe was willing that Mr. Apfel should buy himself a key to fit his, Mr. Wolfe's, lock. And Mr. Apfel was willing that Mr. Wolfe should buy himself a key for his, Mr. Apfel's lock. But neither had any suggestions as to where the money

was to come from to pay for the extra key to either lock, since it was entirely a matter of principle with both of them not to stand for the extortion of one solitary cent.

At last Mr. Wolfe was driven to exclaim: "It's just his blasted spite, dash it! I'm getting a bit fed up on it. If he had a car in the garage, now, I'd have a key made for him. If he had even the faintest intention of ever putting a car in the blooming garage, I'd—"

"How do you know," inquired Irving. "Who gave you a guarantee I ain't?"

Mr. Wolfe did something with his upper lip which made Mr. Apfel continue hotly: "What would you say if I told you I got one picked out already—a new one too? No secondhanded junks—"

"There now, uncle," interposed Neil, who was having the time of his life, "you said if Irving were thinking of getting a car—well now, you hear, Irving says—"

Irving had a feeling he had gone too far. He rose with dignity.

"To show you which one is the spiteful one, Mr. Wolfe, here is a key," depositing one on the table. "Your lock you could sell for junk. That's all it's good for. Some day you'll learn, Mr. Wolfe, it don't pay to be a piker. When I buy a lock I always buy myself two keys. I couldn't stand to have nothing slipped over on me, Mr. Wolfe. But I ain't the kind of a man that makes himself small for a quarter, which is more than some people could say, not mentioning no names."

Some visiting friends left their car before Irving's door. It was of prehistoric vintage. He was examining it with interest when Mr. Wolfe called out to him: "I say now, is that your new car?"

Irving, with a nervous glance in the direction of his own home, sought to discourage the conversation by not replying.

"I understood you to say," continued Mr. Wolfe, "it was to be a new car, what?"

Irving retreated toward the house.

"This ain't it," he vouchsafed surlily.

"Oh, indeed!" Mr. Wolfe was plainly skeptical. "When do you expect yours, now?"

"I'll send you a postal," replied Irving, almost bumping into Bessie in the hall. But if she had overheard she gave no sign.

Only the next evening, returning from the office, he heard her voice at the telephone:

"It's going to be a surprise for me, I'm sure. I told Arthur that day he was at your house for dinner—something made me feel it—and more and more lately I've thought he had it in his mind. Yes, I distinctly heard him say"—and when he entered the dining room her entire manner changed, and she continued innocently—"glove counter. I'll be there. Good-by."

Not three days later he ran into that grafter Saul Hermann on the L.

"Here's that dollar I owe you," said Hermann. Irving nearly fainted, but he pocketed the dollar first. "I hear you're getting a new car?"

Irving paled.

"What?"

"Ye-eh. Your mother-in-law told my wife. We'll be round some night for a ride. News travels quick, don't it?"

"I'll say so!" admitted Irving.

He stopped off at the B & L Delicatessen—so called because the proprietors were named Sokol and Arnstein.

"Call it a quarter of a pound," said Sokol, and Irving's conscience did not urge him to call attention to the fact that the scales registered a good three-eighths. Believe me, lots of times when the store was so crowded you couldn't get near the scales Sokol made enough mistakes the other way! "By the way, what kind of a car is it you got?"

Irving felt himself growing red.

"I got no car."

"But you're getting one, ain't it?" inquired Sokol with such a thoughtful look in the direction of the scales that Irving hastened to answer, "Well, getting ain't got."

Sokol wrapped the cheese.

"With people like you, Mr. Apfel, it is. Everybody round here knows already about it. Your wife's mother was in our other store and she told my partner. Like my partner says to her, 'A man like Mr. Apfel—' "

But what his partner had said about a man like Mr. Apfel the subject of the eulogy did not linger to hear. He was busy with thoughts of his own. All evening he was busy with them. Long after Bessie had gone

to bed he sat there with pencil and paper, still busy. At last he put down the pencil.

"I won't do nothing in a hurry," he told himself, putting out the dining-room light. "I don't want to do nothing rash. I'll sleep on it and see how I feel in the morning."

Well, in the morning he felt practically the same way, only worse. Breakfast held no interest for him, and though he propped the newspaper against the fruit bowl as usual, it was obvious that it failed to hold his attention.

Somewhere in the back of his brain Irving carried an impression, gleaned no doubt from a perusal of the joke papers and shared by the small minority who have not tried to buy a car recently, that buying a car was a mere matter of letting it be known that you wanted one and then dodging those agents whose cars did not happen to appeal to your fancy. He even thought that the days of a prospective automobile purchaser were entirely made up of riding round in different makes of cars with salesmen eager to cut one another's throats for his valued order. They say it used to be like that in the good old days. But, as they say in the third year at C. C. N. Y., O Tempora! O Mawruss!

Irving had many things to learn. The first was that the last thing that troubles the mind of an automobile salesman is your valued order. The next was that if you live in Brooklyn you must buy through a Brooklyn agency, and the third was that the last place on earth to look for an automobile is a Brooklyn agency. Six months they offered him—four months.

One place promised that if anybody countermanded his order he might be fifteenth on the list to get the car. Three months he was offered, as if that ought to make him the King of Jerusalem! Three months! What couldn't happen in three months? He might be dead! Or worse yet, Wolfe might be dead! Three months! Yo!

A secondhand car he might have had. But how did he know what kind of *dreck* they could hand him? And besides, what a satisfaction for Wolfe! An open car he might have had too. Just a coupé had to be *grad* so hard to get!

Certain it is no salesmen came to take him out for rides. In fact no salesmen came near him at all. Not even a cigar did he get. There he stood ready to shell out good cash, and nobody even wanted it. A live salesman could have sold him, *eppes*, a ten-thousand-dollar car. But a live salesman is even harder to find in these times than a ten-thousand-dollar car!

Determined to try every agency in town Irving came finally in the offices of the Birchland Company upon a friendly voice—the kind of voice that didn't make you feel you had your nerve to call up about a nothing like a order for a automobile. This voice actually took his name and number and promised to call him back—did call him back, and told him he could have a coupé in six weeks!

Irving stopped off at the Brooklyn agency of the Birchland on his way home. Mr. Ring was an affable man. He actually seemed pleased at the prospect of

getting Mr. Apfel's order. He got it. The Birchland ain't exactly the dearest car on the market, y'understand, but if you stand a Birchland coupé next to any other coupé, who knows the difference? And it don't cost such a fortune to run neither. For the first car, who wants such a expensive elephant? After you learn to run it is plenty time for such expensive cars. And only six weeks to wait! Tra-la-la!

For days Irving floated in a glamorous sort of haze, until in Oppers' Restaurant he ran into Julius Mayer, of the Jayem Company, Used Cars.

"Julius," Irving could not resist asking, "what do you think about the Birchland?"

"I don't have to think. I know." Something about his voice gave Irving a sinking sensation—his gesture rudely dissipated the glamorous gaze. "You ain't thinking of buying one, I hope?"

Irving denied it with perfect honesty. At that moment he was only thinking of how to get out of buying one.

"It's a bunch of junk. There's only one medium-priced car on the market. That's a Huck."

Irving crossed to the telephone booth. He could not get in because there was a man in there yelling his head off.

"Serves you right," he was screaming. "A Huck? Who buys a Huck only a greenhorn? Didn't I told you before you done it—'Get a Hodge!'"

Max Baumann hailed Irving in passing.

"Know anybody wants to buy a car cheap?"

"No," replied Irving gloomily; "what kind?"

"A Hodge. I want to sell it and get another Birchland like I had. Four years I had mine. Never no trouble—nothing. Were you trying to telephone?"

"No," responded Irving, "I changed my mind. What was that you were saying about your Birchland?"

The beginning of February Irving took his first lesson. In two weeks the car would be there, and he meant to know how to run it. They sent to instruct him a little snip with a cigarette dangling from his pale lips and a superior way of talking about cylinders, exhausts, gears and what not that gave Irving a pain. And though, under his guidance, Irving succeeded in getting the car to go, keep on going and stop most of the times he listed—and some of the times he didn't list—still at the end of the lesson he felt discouraged. The cigarettel was such a feller, y'understand, he don't know how to explain something so you could understand it. All he knows is how to make you feel like a fool if you don't understand it.

"Throw out your clutch!" is all he knows to holler, when you don't know what your clutch is, let alone where you should throw it! Such a feller only makes you nervous.

The second lesson Irving was ready for him. Pencil and paper he had with him.

"Now," he demanded, "tell me what I do—but slow."

The cigarettel sighed wearily.

"Connect your ignition."

"You mean push round this button, ain't it?" and Irving wrote, "*Push round left-hand button.*"

"Then?"

"Advance the spark—give her gas—"

The cigarettel demonstrated, his hands busy with the wheel.

Wrote Irving: "*Push hands till it's like a quarter past four,*" and continued:

"Put foot on starting button. If it don't, pull out choker—try again.

"See long stick is loose to jiggle round Neutral.

"See the break is off.

"Push hands till it's like five after five.

"Push stick left and back—this is first.

"Put right foot on axellerator.

"Push out the left foot—push in the right."

Nu? Ain't that easier than all that guessing work? He makes such a paper for going into high, for stopping, backing up, everything. Then he learns them by heart, and if he forgets something, all he's got to do is look up the paper. Ain't that a cinch?

Sure! Only crossing Flatbush Avenue once he failed to perceive until too late that trolley cars were coming simultaneously from both directions. Whereupon half of him decided to hurry ahead, and the other half of him, quite independently, decided to back up. As a result of which the whole of him did something that was not written down on any of the papers, I guess, because the Birch came to a wholly non-strategic stop square across the car tracks. Irving forgot everything. He even forgot where he put the papers. His memory was entirely engrossed with all the details of all the automobile accidents he had ever read of or

heard of or witnessed. He even recalled how Mr. Wolfe on his first day out, in trying to pass round a truck, had grown rattled and run over a woman, who was suing for heavy damages. It even occurred to him that Mr. Wolfe should worry—he had insurance. But—he, Irving, had no insurance!

Meanwhile a chauffeur in back of him had described a breath-destroying arc, which he could witness out of the corner of his eye while making footless attempts—with both feet—to budge his car. And the two motormen, who had halted just when Irving was convinced that even if he escaped death he would never be the same, did not by their choice of language make it any easier for him to concentrate on the subject in hand. Nor did the interested attention of the bystanders, nor the instructions which the cigarettel was barking at him, move either him or the Birchland to any spectacular feats of locomotion. To Irving at that moment life was just one damn stall after another. Finally, when for a bent nickel you could have bought Irving's entire stock in himself, the cigarettel gave a grab and a jab, and the Birchland continued serenely on its way.

And after a while Irving got the hang of the thing, and six weeks to the day after he had given his valued order he called Mr. Ring on the telephone. He really expected to hear that his car was there! Instead Mr. Ring explained affably that because of the cold no freight had been moved.

"Don't you expect cold weather in winter? What's th' idea, promising to deliver a car in February if in

cold weather you can't deliver no cars? Did you think maybe this year we would have summer in February?"

"If," suggested Mr. Ring coldly, "you feel like getting out of your contract, Mr. Apfel—"

Mr. Apfel did not. By no means.

"I was only going to say," he concluded pleasantly, "when do you think my car will be here, if you don't mind?"

Mr. Ring thought in another week or two. But two weeks later Mr. Ring advised him affably that on account of the railroad strike nobody was getting any cars.

"You oughtn't to get impatient, Mr. Apfel. There's a man here been waiting eight months for his car."

"How is it," inquired Irving bitterly, "you didn't tell me about him when I was giving th' order?"

"If you feel like—" began Mr. Ring, but Irving hung up the receiver.

One morning coming down his front path he almost collided with Mr. Wolfe.

"Sorry to hear about your trouble, Mr. Wolfe—" he fell into step beside him. "Neil told me on the telephone last night. Ten thousand dollars! That's a big verdict! You're gonna appeal?"

"That," responded Mr. Wolfe ungraciously, "is the affair of the insurance company—entirely."

Irving missed the implication.

"You're covered, ain't you?" And when Mr. Wolfe seemed not to have heard him he repeated: "You're covered?"

"No." Mr. Wolfe bit off the word testily.

Irving was stunned.

"How comes you didn't carry enough insurance?"

Mr. Wolfe resented the slur on his foresight.

"Five thousand dollars is all they'll give you in any of their blasted companies!"

Irving felt so sorry for him he paid his fare.

"It's too bad," he sympathized later, seated beside him in the train, and though he was truly sorry for Mr. Wolfe, there was none the less a little edge on his words. "Too bad you didn't think to put the car in your wife's name."

Mr. Wolfe's expression was undecipherable. Then, "I jolly well did," he answered, and buried his nose in his paper.

Before Irving had a chance to recover from this, his neighbor looked up from the headlines with such a look in his eyes that Irving felt in his bones he was going to tell him bad news. Irving's bones were better than that barometer his wife's aunt brought from Europe, and that you had to be a mind reader to understand.

"I say," remarked Mr. Wolfe, "the blooming Birchlands have gone up in price."

Irving was relieved.

"It's nothing in my life. My order is in over two months already."

"Oh, but you'll have to pay the blooming advance anyway, what?"

"What do you mean?"

"My friend Ferguson, of the Dash Company, tells me all the blooming automobile contracts are subject

to price prevailing on date of delivery, don't you know."

"Foolishness!" replied Irving, who nevertheless felt a sinking in his stomach. "Because they ain't able to deliver me my car when they promised I got to pay them yet a bonus?"

"If you look up your blooming contract," suggested Mr. Wolfe, "I dare say you'll find that you jolly well do."

Irving reached his office feeling low. Mr. Ring, simply radiating affability over the telephone, confirmed his worst fears. Yes, all contracts were made subject to price prevailing on date of delivery. Irving got his contract out of the safe. Not that he doubted his misfortune, but he just wanted to take a look at such a contract that he, Irving Apfel, was damn fool enough to sign. His eye traveled sadly down the page. Then he straightened perceptibly, and some of the sadness vanished. Again—this time with a beating heart—he read his contract.

For once Mr. Ring seemed on the verge of divorce from his affability. He had to read his own copy of the contract three times before he could believe what Irving told him, and then he assured Irving it was the only contract that had ever gone out of his office without such a clause. Mr. Ring did not seem to take much stock in the theory of luck. He blamed it all on the carelessness of the salesman who had signed Mr. Apfel up, and the only thing that kept the salesman from losing his job was the fact that he had thrown it up two weeks before.

The next time Irving inquired after his car he learned that the fellows who supply the raw materials were holding them up because of strikes, though as Irving hinted to Mr. Ring, whose affability was beginning to get on his nerves, why a car that should have been shipped in January should be held up at the end of March for lack of raw materials wasn't exactly clear. And furthermore he did not feel like disposing of his contract!

Followed the freight embargo on luxuries, and right on top of that a lovely warm Sunday, with automobiles as thick as flies in a mountain boarding house. And as if that ain't aggravation enough, Mr. Wolfe goes riding out like the King of Jerusalem in his second-hand Fearless. Never a word that feller says when you're dying for conversation. But if there's one time when any kind of conversation would only be a aggravation, believe me, he ain't tongue-tied.

"I say now," began Mr. Wolfe, "where's the blooming Birchland?"


"I loaned it to President Wilson," replied Irving with a facetiousness he was far from feeling—oh, very far.

"New cars are deuced scarce, what?" rejoined Mr. Wolfe. "I do believe it's more satisfactory, don't you know, to own a used car than to keep on nearly owning a new one, what? There's a new Dash you could get. My friend Ferguson says they happen to have one in the shop—blooming paint scratched off and all that sort of thing—had to be sent to the paint shop, don't you know. But I don't suppose they could sell

you that—living in Brooklyn and all that sort of rot. Besides, it's probably too dashed much money for you. It's a pretty good car, the Dash. Not at all in the same blooming class as the Birchland, don't you know."

Irving only knew that he was so mad that if he didn't talk to somebody he would bust—positively. He went up and talked to Bessie. He told her everything. Of course she made believe she was surprised. They had a long heart-to-heart talk. The upshot of that talk was that the next day Irving Apfel presented himself at the New York offices of the Dash Company. His wife was with him. Mr. Ferguson was a nice man. He was sympathetic; also he was a good salesman. He agreed, when Irving had related his treatment at the hands of the Birchland people—though he did not like to run down a competitor—that Irving had a grievance. And he felt certain that Irving would have no difficulty in disposing of his Birchland—if it ever arrived—even if the Birchland people did not back up their repeated offers to relieve him of his contract. Irving felt certain of it too; so did Bessie. At that moment the Birchland seemed the remotest of remote possibilities; the Dash the most concrete of fascinating realities.

Moreover, as I have said, Mr. Ferguson had a charming personality. How did Mr. Apfel—was it?—happen to have heard about the Dash they had coming out of the shop? Through Mr. Wolfe? Ah, so! Mr. Apfel was very fortunate. If the car had ever reached the floor—the Dash cars went like hot cakes. He could guarantee to sell six in two hours if he had them



on the floor. Mr. Apfel could have the Dash the day after to-morrow. Bessie was in high spirits all the way home.

"I'm so glad you took the Dash, dear. It's such a nice-looking car."

"No better than the Birchland. In fact if you stand them side by side they look like twins."

"But everybody knows the Dash is a better car."

"It ought to be. It costs a thousand dollars more."

"Oh, but it sounds so much better to say you have a Dash than a Birchland."

"To tell the truth, for the sound I wouldn't give a thousand dollars extra. Even th' upholstery is the same."

"Anybody would think you were sorry you had given your order."

Well, in a way. You don't like to pay a thousand dollars more for nilly the same thing you could get for a thousand dollars less. And anyway, he had to pretend he lived in New York or they wouldn't have given him the car, and no man really likes that kind of bluffing. With the Birchland he didn't have to do such hocus-pocus.

"Yes, but when would you get the old Birchland?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, what's the hurry? Did I promise somebody a ride for *Pesach*? I waited four months already, so I could wait another coupla weeks."

"Well, there's no use crying over it. The Dash is bought."

Well, so was the Birchland—even more so, when you came right down to it. And when you think how

polite that feller Ring always was, and the time they spent giving him lessons! Irving began to feel not a little ashamed. And after all, nearly everybody said the Birchland was a good car and a bargain for the money. Not only the initial cost would be less, but it would cost less to run. Less for tires, less for gas, less for insurance. A genuine nostalgia for his Birchland began to possess Irving's soul. Why on earth had he let Bessie talk him into buying that Dash? Why must the women always make a man crazy with style? Wasn't he perfectly satisfied with his Birchland all along? And now what did he have? Two cars on his hands, and maybe lawsuits and God knows what. Dammit, if only the women wouldn't keep mixing in!

By the time they reached home Irving had retired into the silences. Annie, opening the door, informed him that somebody had phoned for him.

"The office! D'y'ever see? One day I go away and—"

No, it wasn't the office. It was a Mr. Bell.

"Bell?"

"No—Ring. He says your car is there, and will you please come and take it away to-morrow."

Irving could contain himself no longer.

"You see?" he demanded of the perplexed Bessie—"you see?" and marched with extreme dignity and bitterness to the bedroom and slammed the door.

He called Arthur up after supper.

"I don't think there'll be any trouble," he explained to his legal adviser. "The Dash feller says the Dash

cars go like hot cakes. In two hours he could sell six from the floor if he only had them. But I thought before I do anything I'll better call you up. What do you think?"

"How," inquired the lawyer, "could a smart business man like you get yourself in such a hole?"

Irving was pained.

"Listen, Arthur! I don't need a lawyer to ask me questions. What I need a lawyer for is to tell me answers. What should I do?"

"Here's what you do! Go up to the Dash people in the morning and tell them you find yourself financially embarrassed—don't think you'll be able to meet payment on the car—you know, ask for a little extension of time. Put it on thick, and if you do it right they'll be glad to give you back your deposit and get out of the contract."

"What? Me? Irving Apfel—I should go up and tell such a automobile salesman I ain't got three thousand dollars to pay for his car? Rather I'll be stuck with three cars."

"Suit yourself, but don't come crying to me."

"Listen, Arthur, can't you see? I look like a damn fool!"

"Well?"

Irving hung up the receiver. That's what you get for having your wife's family for a lawyer. What you want from a lawyer is business advice, not personal opinions. He spent a sleepless and unprofitable night.

At nine the next morning the office phone rang. It

was Mr. Ferguson. Mr. Ferguson was a polite and charming man, but you could see his feelings were badly wounded. Mr. Apfel had stated, and had made his application to state that he resided in Manhattan, whereas the night before, merely through chance and the kindness of a friend, Mr. Abraham Wolfe, Mr. Ferguson had learned that Mr. Apfel resided in Brooklyn. Mr. Wolfe, though hating to do it, had admitted that Mr. Apfel was in fact a neighbor of his in Brooklyn. Now to permit a resident of Brooklyn to have a car out of New York stock would be in violation of their contract with their Brooklyn agency. Mr. Apfel saw that, did he not?

No, he did not. Mr. Apfel refused to have anything to do with the Brooklyn agency. Mr. Ferguson was very patient. He explained again all about their contract with their Brooklyn agency. Mr. Apfel was inclined to be unreasonable. He refused to understand. Mr. Ferguson's patience began to skid. Mr. Apfel remained obdurate. If Mr. Apfel had betrayed even a glimmer of reason, Mr. Ferguson, who was a very charming man, and patient, might have fixed it up for him. But Mr. Apfel continued to be so unreasonable that Mr. Ferguson, who was only human, finally lost his temper and refused in the name of the Dash Company to have any further dealings with Mr. Apfel at all! Mr. Apfel was afraid that, God forbid! he should change his mind, so he took the precaution to stop payment on his check. It don't do to depend too much on luck, even if it begins to look as if there is such a thing, *takisch*.

It was with a light spirit Irving called up the Birchland and learned that his car was really there.

"You'll be out for it this afternoon?" Mr. Ring inquired.

"I should say not! I got to get my insurance first. Just keep it a few days yet."

"We'll have to charge you storage," Mr. Ring advised him cheerfully.

Irving exploded. Did y'ever hear such a high-handed robbery way of doing business? They can keep you waiting four months for your car. That's all right. But the minute it comes, right away, quick, they expect you should come over like a magician and whistle it away! Storage! When you got a garadge home that you never used since you moved in only to store in a stepladder and two cans of paint! The temper into which Irving had previously thrown Mr. Ferguson was a seven days' calm compared with the temper into which Mr. Ring now threw Irving.

"I'll see you in Germany," he yelled—or some equally undesirable locality—"before I'll pay you a cent storage! Six o'clock I'll come over so I'll take away my car!"

He immediately called up his wife's Uncle Nathan about the insurance.

"Sure you can have it right away as a special favor. Day after to-morrow."

"What good is day after to-morrow? To-day I got to have it!"

Uncle Nathan was not of an excitable temperament.

"What's the sweat?" he inquired placidly.

"Four months I'm begging him already take out for me a little insurance on my car! And now when I need it he says, 'What's the sweat?' "

"But I told you to give me three or four days' notice."

"Listen, *chammer*, and try to forget for a minute you're a fool. How could I give you three days' notice when I only heard it myself to-day? That's what I get for mixing business with relations!"

You can imagine the way he felt. Not only he must take out his car without even a lesson to brush up his memory, but he must take it out yet without insurance. But on the other hand, what was there to be afraid of so much? The whole thing was maybe two miles to drive. All the fools in the world could run automobiles. Most of his friends did. And the last time he had done very well, without any help from the cigarettel. He could manage already. There was nothing to be nervous about. Was he maybe gonna be reckless or something?

Still he could not keep his mind on business. Round and round in his head went the formula—"Push round the button—push the hands to a quarter after four—see the brake is off."

He did nothing all day but start the car—stop the car—go into first—go into second—go into high—reverse. Once while the girl was out to lunch he sat down at the typewriter to address an envelope and his foot reached out absent-mindedly for the starter.

At last closing time drew near. The nearer it drew the harder he tried to keep it from arriving. But

finally he could not find another thing to do. He had to start. He thought he was going to be ill—he had such a funny feeling round his heart, and his hands were like ice!

There was not a single flaw in the subway service that evening. Before he had started and stopped his car fifty times he was there. The check was given to Mr. Ring—most affable. He was seated in the car—his own car. His feet searched out the starting button—the clutch. His hands were busy at the wheel—he was off!

“I don’t know yet how it happened!” Irving mopped his brow with his handkerchief, and bracing his feet against the lower drawer of his desk leaned back in his office chair. “For the life of me, I don’t know yet how such a thing could happen to me!”

Neil regarded him sympathetically. Though it was the seventeenth time he had heard the details of the tragedy, he listened patiently.

“Everything was going along so fine. Not a bit of trouble all the way home—not a stall—nothing. Through the park—through traffic—everything.

“And then on my own street such a big *gonef* has to get ahead of me with a truck, and he won’t let me past. I should ride up my own street the first time in back of such a elephant—nobody wouldn’t see me at all. I give him a toot. Yo! He should worry! I give him another toot. Then I get so mad I give him three—four—five toots!

"Finely he moves over a little. I didn't realize it was so near the crossing. I put on gas to go past him—*gevalt!* All of a sudden I see a feller coming down the avenue, so I thought already I'm smashed in pieces! I give a turn out, so I'm in the other feller's way! I give another turn in. You could believe me, Neil, I don't know how it is to this day! I didn't see her till it was already too late! I give you my word I never seen that woman till I was on top of her already!"

He paused to mop his brow again.

"Such a *schlemazel!* Not for a million dollars would I do such a thing to nobody—let alone a woman that—"

Neil sought to stem the tide of self-recrimination.

"There now, Irving, don't you worry! Everybody knows it wasn't your fault, and she's not badly hurt. You know they said at the hospital it was mostly shock."

"Oh, sure, I know she'll be all right again, but I'll never forget it so long I live! Just to me such a thing should happen! Just to me!" and he shook his head from side to side sadly.

"Nonsense, Irving!" Neil tried to cheer him up. "Buck up! Those things happen to everybody. Look at my uncle—had the same thing happen to him his first day out!"

"Ye-eh, I know"—Irving forgot his own troubles for a moment—"and they got a ten-thousand-dollar verdict, and his insurance was only five. But a lot

they could do with such a verdict when the car's in his wife's name. I got to hand it to your uncle. He's a smart man. He ain't the kind that gets stung easy."

"Then I didn't tell you about Aunt Mathilde's legacy?"

"A legacy? No! What?"

"Poor Aunt Mathilde! All her life she's been a slave to an old uncle because he promised her when he died he'd leave her something. And then he had to go and die two days after they got a judgment against Aunt Mathilde, and the five thousand dollars she's been waiting for all her life and the insurance just covered it. What do you think of that for luck?"

"Your aunt got a legacy?" Irving was so excited he almost tipped his chair over backward, and had to seize the edge of his desk to steady himself. "She's good for the money?"

Neil nodded sadly.

"She got word that she was heir to five thousand dollars just two days after they got a judgment against her for that much. I thought I told you."

Irving shook his head from side to side.

"Th—th—that's really a *schlemazel*—the poor woman! What's she gonna do?"

Neil began to laugh reminiscently.

"I can see that Arthur isn't given to talking about his clients' affairs, or you would have heard. Poor Aunt Mathilde was so sore at uncle she got up on her ear for once in her life and decided to take things

in her own hands. She asked me what she should do. I gave her Arthur's number. I knew if there was anything she could do he'd tell her what it was. Well, you know Arthur.

"He found out there were other things uncle had put in her name, and she grabbed them, and so she'll come out all right even if the verdict is upheld. For once she's slipping it over on uncle. Every time I think of it I could die laughing."

But Irving had no laugh in him.

"Your poor uncle. My enemies *gesugt* such a luck!"

"What's that? Luck? Thought you didn't believe in luck!"

"I don't," said Irving—"really. Only if there is such a thing—hard luck, I mean—your uncle is certainly got it."

"You said it! He's had hard luck all his life. But you, you big stiff, everything you touch breaks right for you. You've got the real article, ten carat, blue white. You know there's a saying, 'Jew luck is better than Christian science.'"

Irving's face broke into the first smile he had been able to conjure up in forty-eight hours.

"That's a good one, Neil! By golly, I got to tell Bessie! That's *takisch* a good one! 'Jew luck is better than Christian science!' When I think your uncle, with insurance and the car in his wife's name and everything, runs over a woman and it costs him right away five thousand dollars—and I got no insurance and the car ain't in my wife's name and I ain't got even a license, and I run over a woman and it don't

cost me a cent, because it should just happen the woman is my own mother-in-law—maybe there is such a thing—luck. And maybe I got it—*unbeschrieben*,” he added hastily.

THE END





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